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**DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

**An Exploratory Study of Hong Kong Chinese  
Students' Conceptions and Experiences of  
Academics' Care within a Higher Education Context**

**A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education  
from the School of Education, Durham University**

**by**

**Lai La TANG  
School of Education  
Durham University**

**March 2017**

## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1. Rationale for the Thesis	10
1.2. Background of the Thesis	13
1.3. Conceptual Framework of the Thesis	27
1.4. Nature of the Thesis	32
1.5. Contributions of the Thesis	33
1.6. Research Setting	37
1.7. Organization of the Thesis	37
 <b>Chapter 2. Literature Review</b>	 <b>39</b>
2.1. An Overview of Literature	39
2.2. Definitions of Care and Pedagogy	41
2.3. Care in the Pedagogical Context	49
2.3.1. Care and its Pedagogical Implications	49
2.3.2. Ethics of Care and its Pedagogical Practices	51
2.3.3. Limitations of an Ethics of Care in the Chinese Context	54
2.3.4. Care and its Pedagogical Qualities	58
2.4. Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning	62
2.4.1. An Overview of Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning	62
2.4.2. Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning and Care in the Pedagogical Context	63
2.4.3. Limitations of Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning	65
2.5. Adult Attachment Theory	70
2.5.1. An Overview of Adult Attachment Theory	70
2.5.2. Limitations of Adult Attachment Theory	74
2.5.3. Adult Attachment in the Chinese Context	76
2.6. Synthesis of the Ethics of Care, Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning and Adult Attachment Theory in the Chinese Context	80

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Chapter 3. Methodology</b>	<b>84</b>
3.1. An Overview of Research Design	84
3.1.1. Research Design in Practice	85
3.2. The Researcher's Role and Beliefs	89
3.3. An Overview of Qualitative Inquiry	94
3.3.1. Setting of the Research	95
3.3.2. The University in this Study	96
3.3.3. Process of Recruiting and Selecting Informants	96
3.3.4. Informed Consent and Permissions	99
3.3.5. Assurance of Confidentiality	101
3.3.6. Gaining Access and Entry	101
3.4. Data Collection Procedures	102
3.4.1. Students' Write-up Accounts	103
3.4.2. In-depth Interviews with Students	104
3.4.3. Researcher's Notes	107
3.5. Data Quality Procedures	109
3.5.1. Credibility	109
3.5.2. Transferability	111
3.5.3. Dependability	112
3.5.4. Reflexivity	113
3.6. Data Management	115
3.7. Data Analysis	116
Step 1. Familiarizing with the Data	118
Step 2. Generating Initial Codes	119
Step 3. Searching for themes	122
Step 4. Reviewing the Themes	123
Step 5. Defining and Naming the Themes	124
Step 6. Producing the Report	125

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Findings</b>	<b>128</b>
4.1. An Overview of the Findings	128
4.2. A Continuum of Academics' Care	132
4.2.1. Pedagogical Care: Instructional Quality	134
4.2.2. Holistic Care: Safety Net	140
4.2.3. Sustainable Care: Reciprocal Care with Long-term Orientation	157
4.3. Deconstructing the Qualities, Perceived Effects and Meanings of Academics' Care	160
4.3.1. Essential Qualities as Engendered by the Cardinal Quality of Trust	160
<i>Trust</i>	161
<i>Passion and Caring from the Heart</i>	164
<i>Empathy</i>	167
<i>Recognition and Respect</i>	169
<i>Positive Attitudes</i>	173
4.3.2. Perceived Effects of Academics' Care on Learning, Development and Well-being	175
<i>Learning</i>	175
<i>Development</i>	180
<i>Well-being</i>	183
4.3.3. Safety Net and Sustainable Bonding as Meanings of Academics' Care	188
<b>Chapter 5. Discussion</b>	<b>195</b>
5.1. An Overview of the Discussion	195
5.2. Conceptual Framework of a Continuum of Academics' Care	196
5.2.1. Pedagogical Care and Study Motivation	200
5.2.2. Holistic Care, Safety Net and Autonomous Growth	205
5.2.3. Sustainable Care and Virtuous Cycle of Care	212
5.2.4. Academics' Care and Well-being	217
5.3. Significance of Academics' Care in the Chinese Cultural Context	224
5.4. Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education: Relational Zone, Attachment Behaviour and Socio-cultural Context	230

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Chapter 6. Conclusion</b>	<b>247</b>
6.1. Overview and Contribution to Knowledge	247
6.2. Academics' Care in the University Context	247
6.3. Improvements for Future Phases of the Research	251
6.4. Directions for Future Research	252
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1. Representation of the Whole Study	255
Appendix 2. Letter of Invitation	256
Appendix 3. Consent Form	258
Appendix 4. Study's Research Questions and Data Collection Methods	259
Appendix 5. Instructions on Write-up Accounts	260
Appendix 6. Connection between the Research Questions and the Interview Questions	261
Appendix 7. Interview Guide	262
Appendix 8. Mind Maps	265
<b>References</b>	<b>269</b>

## List of Figures

		Page
Figure 1.	Schematic Diagram for Theoretical Framework in this Thesis	28
Figure 2.	Representation of How the Research Questions Address the Study's Objectives	86
Figure 3.	Informants' Profiles with Representative Quotes	130
Figure 4.	Relationships between Research Purposes, Research Questions, and Major Domains Emerging from the Data	132
Figure 5.	Chart of Domains with Emergent Themes in Addressing the Implications of Caring Pedagogy	196
Figure 6.	Schematic Diagram for the Conceptual Framework of a Continuum of Academics' Care	197
Figure 7.	Schematic Diagram for the Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education	246



# **An exploratory study of Hong Kong Chinese students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care within a higher education context**

By Lai La TANG

## **Abstract**

This research investigated Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and examined its pedagogical implications within a higher education context. Three purposes framed this study: 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students; 2) To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong; and 3) To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong.

The empirical data were collected from final-year students in the naturalistic setting of a Hong Kong university. By applying a qualitative research design, purposive sampling was used to select students who had experienced academics' care during their university study. Data sources included in-depth interviews, write-up accounts and researcher's notes. Thematic analysis was used to identify the themes emerged from the informants' narrative accounts of academics' care. Data quality procedures, included triangulation, member checks and audit trail, were followed to ensure research rigour.

Results indicated that academics' care was conceptualized as a continuum of care, moving along the continuum from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care". This continuum featured a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity. A dual overarching theme of "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" were identified in conceptualizing academics' care in a university context. This thesis thus proposed a model of caring in higher education rested on three overlapping domains of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context.

This thesis has contributed to an under-researched area of caring pedagogy in a university context. The significant role of academics' care in students' learning, development and well-being has been discerned as a key construct of the socio-culture of care within the Chinese context. Implications were thus offered for future research on caring pedagogy, and for policymakers, university administrators and teachers in further exploring the opportunities presented by integrating care into teaching practices.

## **Declaration**

No part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or in any other institution.

## **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent derived from it should be acknowledged.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I dedicate this whole piece of thesis to my parents and sister. And, I would like to give all my heart and THANKS to my parents and sister for their support and love. Their unswerving support and unrequited love have encouraged me and given the courage to pursue my dream of studying doctoral degree, as well as to hold on to this dream through all the ups and downs. THANK YOU with all my Love.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Rationale for the Thesis**

Care is an integral part of teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith, 2003). As Rogers and Webb (1991, p.174) explain, “good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of caring”. Despite the claim on the primacy of care as a form of therapeutic discourse (Ecclestone, 2004; Ecclestone, Hayes and Furedi, 2005), studies have found that teacher care has numerous benefits, including profound positive effects on students’ academic motivation, endeavours, performance and achievements (Phelan, Locke Davidson and Cao, 1992; Wentzel, 1997; Larson, 2006); the stimulation of transformative changes in and growth among students (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006; Foster, 2008); and increased well-being (Phelan et al., 1992). However, the literature is not extensive, and the significant majority of the studies have focused on the effects of care within compulsory education at the elementary and high school levels. Furthermore, there has been no examination whether academics’ care should be thought to contribute to enhancing students’ outcomes in educational contexts in which the students are adult independent learners. Though one could argue that institutions cannot depend on teachers to care as a way to improve outcomes (if they actually do, given the scant research evidence), studies have shown that particular types of relationships are valued by students and serve to create an ethos of academic involvement and engagement. As such, even by default, studies on pedagogic care are vital in understanding the fullest extent of how pedagogic ecologies are created and linked to student achievement and progress.

All this said, care is not the panacea for solving all educational problems, or the sole ingredient for good teaching practices. Teaching is an art comprising a variety of qualities and exemplifiers, such as instructional qualities, showing empathy, and giving students

appropriate feedback and praise (Rossiter, 1999; Hattie, 2003; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Nevertheless, care has been found to form students' conception of the best teachers (Dempsey, 1994; Weinstein, 1989; Larson, 2006). A common thread connecting the discussions on expert, excellent and effective teachers is high-quality teacher-student relationships as constructed by teacher care. The literature on these successful teachers has shown that they use an array of attitudes, practices and behaviour to create learning experiences underpinned by high-quality teacher-student relationships, and a core element of this relational approach is teacher care (Rogers and Webb, 1991; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Hattie, 2003; Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Sawatzky, Ennis, Ashcroft, Davis and Harder, 2009; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; O'Brien, 2010; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Studies have found that teacher care help to reduce students' negative emotions such as feelings of loneliness and alienation, which is particularly valuable in cases involving at-risk students<sup>1</sup> such as those suffering from depression (Phelan et al., 1992). This may be explained by the fact that students learn most effectively and strive harder academically when their emotional needs are addressed, especially through teacher care (Phelan et al., 1992; Larson, 2006).

Teacher care is also a central element in helping each student develop as a whole person (Neill, 1960; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996). As Hyland (2010) points out that the ends of university education are promoting self-esteem, creativity, job and life satisfaction, trust and social justice rather than parochially focusing on vocational skills or achievement, it is advocated that a university education is responsible for developing students holistically (Tompkins, 1996; Hyland, 2010). And, students are more likely to become caring people after experiencing teacher care (Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006). It is the powerful effects of caring on peoples' lives that prompt transformative changes, rather than the intellectual effects of an education (Fjortoft, 2004). The far-reaching effects of teacher care are reflected in the frequency with which students remember caring

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<sup>1</sup> At-risk individuals are those who are vulnerable and thus are underachieved in an academic, social and personal sense (Lewis and McCann, 2009).

teachers (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004), and the fondness with which such teachers are recalled suggest that students do appreciate the benefits of teacher care (Phelan et al., 1992; Rossiter, 1999; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Mariskind, 2014). As such, teaching should be initiated with care rather than pedagogy (Noddings, 1984).

Despite that care has been emphasized as a critical component of education (Kohl, 1984; Noddings, 1984; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Mariskind, 2014), teacher care remains an under-researched and under-theorized area in educational studies, especially in the context of higher education (Walker and Gleaves, 2016). In the studies on teacher care, much of the discussions are related to pre-school and school settings (Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Mariskind, 2014; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). This has been attributed to the fact that care is often conceptualized using feminist or maternal constructs (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007; Mariskind, 2014). Such conceptualizations are in congruent with the higher education context, which emphasizes autonomous and self-directed learning, a focus on scholarly rigour, arduous intellectual work, logical reasoning, critical thinking and objectivity (Rossiter, 1999; Mariskind, 2014). Hence, care seems to be incongruous in a university setting (Rossiter, 1999). However, some educational systems privilege care as a central cultural starting point, for example Chinese education systems. Chinese society is characterized as relational- and social-oriented, with special emphasis on relationships and communal regard (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992), the cultivation of teacher-student relationships based on academics' care may be even more significant in mediating a caring and supportive environment that facilitates students' learning and holistic development while promoting their well-being in the Chinese context. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of research involving university students' perceptions of academics' care in the Chinese context. The conception and meanings of academics' care have not been examined empirically or made explicit within Chinese society.

Thus, the central aim of this thesis is to explore Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its pedagogical implications in higher education context. Three purposes have framed this research.

- 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students;
- 2) To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong;
- 3) To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong.

## **1.2. Background of the Thesis**

Care is considered as a quintessential quality of education (Kohl, 1984; Noddings, 1984; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Mariskind, 2014), thus teaching should begin with care rather than pedagogy (Noddings, 1984). Teacher care, as a key construct in high-quality teacher-student relationships, is characterized by affection. As such, it can help students transform by changing their learning behaviour, facilitating their academic and holistic development and promoting their well-being (Phelan et al., 1992; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Beard, Clegg and Smith, 2007; Foster, 2008; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; McLaughlin, 2008; Hyland, 2010). Teacher care also plays a crucial role in cultivating high-quality teacher-student relationships by encouraging students to learn, connecting the affective and cognitive dimensions in facilitating learning and creating a secure base from which to thrive during exploration and development. Such is also thought to reduce students' negative emotions, such as feelings of loneliness and isolation (Phelan et al.,



1992). These profound effects are noteworthy, especially among at-risk students or those who are prone to mental health<sup>2</sup> problems. Both of which are hidden issues in the university context, but which respond to an educational system that values the development of the whole person.

A student's mental health is one of the key factors affecting his/her ability to learn effectively (Warwick et al., 2008). Research has shown that feelings of desperation or depression, or lacking a sense of belongings, are some of the factors contributing to students' academic failure (Phelan et al., 1992; Beck and Malley, 1998). Struggling with emotional problems or poor mental health can negatively affect students' cognitive and psycho-social functions, exerting adverse effects on their educational attainment, quality of life and outlook (Stewart-Brown et al., 2000; Suen, Ellis Hon and Tam, 2008; Sing and Wong 2010; Kwok, Wong and Lee, 2014). Chronic suffering from mental health issues also affects long-term physical health (Stewart-Brown et al., 2000; Suen et al., 2008). Thus, mental health issues among university students should not be overlooked.

The well-being of Hong Kong university students deserves attention. Since the start of the academic year 2015/2016, there has been 22 students who committed suicide; of which ten were tertiary students (South China Morning Post, 2016). This was an alarming increase from an average of two to three university student suicides from 2010 to 2014 (ibid.). In their study conducted in a private tertiary institute in Hong Kong, Kwok et al.'s (2014) found that about 86.8% of the students reported suffering from a higher than average level of perceived stress. The presence of insomnia, which can be an expression of mental health problems, has also reflected hidden issues among Hong Kong university students (Suen et al., 2008; Sing and Wong, 2010). Sing and Wong's (2010) study of undergraduate students in Hong Kong found that 68.8% suffered from insomnia. Compared with the 2008 study conducted by Suen et al. in which only 57.5% of the Hong

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<sup>2</sup> Mental health is defined as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or his community" (World Health Organization, 2015).

Kong university students examined were classified as poor sleepers, there appears to be a trend of deteriorating sleep quality. The study conducted by Song et al. (2008) on college freshmen in Hong Kong found that 43.9% had significant depressive symptoms, and it was estimated that 14.5% of them suffered from major depression. Mental health problems tend to get worse as undergraduates progress into their senior years of study, as reflected in higher depression, anxiety and stress scores (Hong Kong Tertiary Institutions Health Care Working Group, 2007). This indicates that Hong Kong university students are susceptible to psychological morbidity (ibid.).

The mental health issues among Hong Kong university students are alerting when compared to their counterparts. The prevalent rates of Hong Kong freshmen suffered from depression, anxiety and stress were significantly higher than their counterparts in Beijing, young American adults, international population or local general population (Wong et al., 2006; Song et al., 2008). Hong Kong undergraduates' sleep duration was shorter than their counterparts in mainland China (Sing and Wong, 2010). Moreover, 32.5% of young people aged below 25 in Hong Kong showed symptoms of depression, almost four times as higher than that of adult population (Hong Kong Government, 2011). Worse still, more than half of them were prone to suicide or self-harm (ibid.). Thus, Hong Kong university students' susceptibility to mental health issues cannot be overestimated.

Mental health issues among Hong Kong university students must be considered; especially given the increasing number of hidden sufferers. It is estimated that one in ten children and young people in the United Kingdom has a clinically-recognizable mental disorder (Warwick et al., 2008). For each adult who dies of suicide, there may be more than 20 attempted suicides (World Health Organization, 2015). The stigma that surrounds mental illness may prevent college students in the United Kingdom from seeking help (Warwick et al., 2008). Severe mental illness-based stigma and discrimination are found in Hong Kong and China (Tsang, Chan and Cheung, 2003). Cultural issues explain some of the serious stigma in Chinese society, and the associated

feelings of shame and inferiority. Both the individual and his/her entire family are shunned due to collectivism (Hsu, 1995 cited in Tsang et al., 2003). The inherited, collective stigma towards mental illness in Chinese culture partially explains why mental health problems in Hong Kong are usually described as somatic problems, such as loss of appetite or fatigue, unlike in the United States (Stewart et al., 2002; Tsang et al., 2003; Sing and Wong, 2010). The tendency to somaticizing mental health problems may lead sufferers to ignore the issues, such that they fail to receive proper treatment (Stewart et al., 2002). University students may just normalize the difficulties encountered as a matter of course during their university study, rather than seeing them as mental health problems (Clegg, Bradley and Smith, 2006). Mental health problems are usually associated with adults, and those that occur among university students are often reduced to behavioural problems, such as truancy (Warwick et al., 2008). All of these reasons may explain why only 17.5% of Hong Kong tertiary students claimed to be dissatisfied with their general health (Kwok et al., 2014), a reality may lead to an under-estimation of the seriousness of Hong Kong students' mental health issues (Stewart et al., 2002).

The importance of supporting university students' mental health has been recognized (Warwick et al., 2008). According to the claim of therapeutic discourse, acknowledging university students' struggles infantilized them by trivializing their experiences, which damaged their growth and development (Ecclestone, 2004; Ecclestone et al., 2005). However, empirical findings have rebutted these allegations in the university setting (Clegg et al., 2006; Beard et al., 2007). It has been found that university students in the United Kingdom regard seeking help or admitting an inability to cope with difficulties as a failure or loss of face, which is incongruent with university students' identities as independent and autonomous young adults (Clegg et al., 2006). They tend to draw on their own individual and social resources, rather than using formal support (Clegg et al., 2006; Beard et al., 2007). These findings have shown that undergraduate students are active, independent and autonomous social agents in appropriating the resources needed to cope with problems by themselves, rather than being objectified and becoming overly

dependent on therapeutic counselling. Nevertheless, this does not refute therapeutic discourse completely (Clegg et al., 2006). It has been acknowledged that caring for students may be conflated with emotional commitment and remedial orientation activities in universities (Walker, Gleaves and Grey, 2006). Yet holding such a view of caring work can be detrimental to students, given their susceptibility to mental health issues. It is thus necessary to address students' difficulties and help them develop positive coping strategies (Beard et al., 2007) while remaining free of the trap of therapeutic discourse. As such, the importance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic development and well-being has been acknowledged (Warwick et al., 2008; Hyland, 2010).

In addition, cultivating a caring culture is regarded as necessary to counter-balance the growing predominant trends of economic rationalism and managerialism, given the pervasive emphasis on employability and job-related marketable skills in higher education (Tompkins, 1996; Mok, 2003; 2005; 2008; Hyland, 2010). There is a renewed interest in the value of whole person development, thus universities are increasingly being expected to cultivate students' holistic growth (Tompkins, 1996; Hyland, 2010). This holistic focus should be linked to overarching humanitarian ends, such as human happiness and the promotion of a just community (Hyland, 2010). An education should be perceived as an introduction to life rather than as training for a career (Tompkins, 1996; Hyland, 2010). As such, teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings and providing them with ample learning opportunities to enrich their life chances (Cochran-Smith, 2003). However, teacher care remains a largely disregarded aspect of academics' work (Walker et al., 2006; Mariskind, 2014).

Given all of the mentioned issues, the importance of cultivating an ethos of non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in the university context to support students' holistic development and well-being is clear (Warwick et al., 2008; Hyland, 2010). Support programmes cannot stand alone or be the sole purview of counsellors'

(Warwick et al., 2008). Undergraduates with positive personal tutoring experiences have noted the importance of having a good tutor-tutee relationship in providing a balanced mix of personal and academic support (Stephen, O'Connell and Hall, 2008). It has been suggested that academics take responsibilities for students' holistic development (McLaughlin, 2008; Shek, 2010). This is not to refute the part played by special programmes in supporting students' mental health, but rather to recognize the importance of teachers' roles and behaviour in contributing to students' well-being (McLaughlin, 2008; Warwick et al., 2008).

Many are quick to point out that academics' pedagogical role is teaching, not therapeutic counselling (Clegg et al., 2006). It has been argued that academics should therefore address learning and teaching issues, such as implementing good pedagogical practices and taking the initiative in providing educational support, rather than focusing only on students' therapeutic needs (ibid.). However, because teaching and learning are social and relational processes (Noddings, 1984; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Kim, 2007), academics' care is thought to play a central role in facilitating students' holistic growth and promoting their well-being. Such academics' care is thought to contribute to cultivating high-quality teacher-student relationships by connecting the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning to create a caring and supportive environment in which to learn. This provides a secure base from which to thrive during exploration and development. The transformative influences of teacher care on students have been shown to transcend a variety of learning contexts, from pre-schools to universities (Foster, 2008).

Learning is a relational construct and process supported by care, rather than just a pedagogical concern (Noddings, 1984; Kim, 2007). Teacher-student relationships determine classroom and school climates (Ruus et al., 2007). Positive teacher-student relationships have been found to contribute to students' learning interests, study motivations, academic performances and achievements, behavioural adjustment, adaptation to schools, social skills, emotional regulation, well-being and long-term holistic

development, especially among at-risk students (Pianta, Steinberg and Rollins, 1995; Beck and Malley, 1998; Wentzel, 1998; Urdan and Schoenfelder, 2006; McLaughlin, 2008). Likewise, in the university setting, positive faculty-student relationships are known to have positive effects on medical care students to achieve favourable learning outcomes (Haidet and Stein, 2006). In contrast, negative teacher-student relationships are one of the factors contributing to students being categorized as at-risk (Lewis and McCann, 2009). This reflects the important role of teacher-student relationships in cultivating an overall ethos of non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in the university context to students' learning and well-being, creating a virtuous cycle.

The effects of teacher-student relationships on students' learning are noteworthy in the Chinese context, where Chinese society is characterized as relational- and social-oriented, with special emphasis on relationships (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). It has been argued that there are no individuals in Chinese society because everyone is connected through a relational and collective web of relationships (ibid.). The Confucian<sup>3</sup> concept of *Wu Lun* (five cardinal relations<sup>4</sup>), which is deeply embedded in Chinese society, has long governed social actors' roles, obligations and acceptable behaviour when interacting with one another. When applied to the pedagogical context, Confucian teaching underlines teachers' practising good conduct in their relationships with students to groom the latter's holistic growth (Shim, 2008). When the Confucian concept of teaching is synthesized with Vygotsky's emphasis on socially-mediated context, the centrality of teachers and learners' continuous interactions and the importance of establishing high-quality relationships in creating an effective learning context becomes even more profound (Vygotsky, 1978; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Shim, 2008). Teachers' expressions of care and their cultivation of relationships built on it have become crucial

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<sup>3</sup> Confucianism is the predominant philosophical school of thought among Chinese societies.

<sup>4</sup> *Wu Lun* refers to the five cardinal relations, which include that between emperor and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend (Bond, 1991; Goodwin and Tang, 1996).

in mediating a caring and supportive learning environment that helps students learn and achieve holistic growth in the Chinese context.

A high-quality, positive and effective teacher-student relationship, rather than any general relationship, is required to favourably influence students' studies, coping strategies and long-term holistic development (Pianta et al., 1995; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Stephen et al., 2008; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). In the university setting, medical care students have been found to be more willing to disclose their lack of understanding rather than hiding it from their teachers, more attentive and actively engaged and more likely to ask questions when they experienced positive teacher-student relationships (Haidet and Stein, 2006). These relationships have had profound effects on students' identity formation, prospective career choices and professional development (Haidet and Stein, 2006; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). High-quality teacher-student relationships have been characterized as learner-centred in that they positively influence students' engagement, learning motivation, self-esteem and well-being, along with their cognitive, social and holistic development (Cornelius-White, 2007; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). Confucian beliefs also emphasize the importance of learner-centred teaching in facilitating students' motivation to learn and holistic growth (Shim, 2008). Confucian teaching stresses that teachers should identify the unique characteristics of each of their students, and then individualize their teaching methods to help their students learn and grow holistically (ibid.). This underlines the importance of high-quality, learner-centred teacher-student relationships in facilitating students' learning and holistic growth while promoting their well-being.

A common denominator in these discussions on high-quality, learner-centred teacher-student relationships has been the pervasiveness of teacher care in nurturing caring relationships (O'Brien, 2010; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). A key construct of teacher care is teachers' personalized responsiveness to individual student's needs, rather than treating them as a homogenized mass (Noddings, 1984). As such, acknowledging and

understanding students' needs, difficulties, struggles, insecurities and pains to provide customized support and showing genuine empathy are central to high-quality teacher-student relationships in the university context (Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). This implies the central role of academics' care in creating caring teacher-student relationships that support students' learning, holistic growth and well-being.

The significant role played by academics' care in high-quality, learner-centred teacher relationships may be attributable to the affective, emotional and secure bonds between teachers and students fostered by such care. Affect and emotion are important relationship components (Haidet and Stein, 2006) and outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Learner-centred teacher-student relationships are characterized by individualized attention paid to students through customized responses. This gradually establishes a bond and a secure base from which students thrive during the exploration process. The learner-centred relationships also help reducing students' feelings of alienation and isolation by increasing their agency (Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013), which enhances their emotional well-being and their chances of succeeding academically. This perspective assumes that students' failure in schools is usually due to feelings of loneliness and alienation, rather than inadequate cognitive skills (Phelan et al., 1992; Beck and Malley, 1998). In contrast, an unusually high correlation has been found among learner-centered relationships, and students' critical and creative thinking and their affective and behavioural outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). A high-quality teacher-student relationship, characterized by emotional security, emotional warmth, open personal communication and an absence of conflicts, has noteworthy effects on students' learning, motivation and behavioural adjustment in pre-school settings (Pianta et al., 1995). These findings corroborate the theoretical framework suggesting that the affective and cognitive dimensions are inseparable in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999). The results also align with attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of students having emotionally-involved and -secure relationships with significant others (including teachers) to thrive in their holistic development. Teachers



play a key role as co-investigator of knowledge by connecting the affective and cognitive aspects of learning and fostering emotionally-secure teacher-student relationships, and teacher care is a key element of such relationships (Noddings, 1984; Goldstein, 1999).

The interdependency of the affective and cognitive dimensions has been reflected in the emphasis that Vygotskian approach places on the relational zone in learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999). However, conventional thought indicates that affect and emotions are considered incongruous in higher education. Given that universities are considered to be places where intellectual development occurs, the emphases are scholarly rigour, arduous intellectual work, rationality, logical reasoning, critical thinking and objectivity, with the focus on autonomous and self-directed learning (Rossiter, 1999; Clegg et al., 2006; Beard et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010; Mariskind, 2014). Thus, in the university context, there is a gross deficiency in affective domains in the learning process that has disengaged learners from their emotions, values and wider interests (Hyland, 2010). Education based exclusive on cognition at the expense of affect, or vice versa, has been shown to be detrimental to students' holistic development (Hyland, 2010), assuming that human beings have an innate need for affection (Ruus et al., 2007). There is a clear and distinct connection between the affective and emotional aspects, and the information processing, knowledge development and learning motivation (Turner, Meyer and Schweinle, 2003; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Hyland, 2010). The affective aspects of learning also contribute to social integration, which facilitates student success in university settings (Beard et al., 2007). This has reflected the importance of connecting the affective and cognitive dimensions in the learning process in the university context as a way of contributing to students' holistic development (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999; Turner et al., 2003; Beard et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010).

Academics' care may be the method by which the affective and cognitive dimensions in the learning process can be connected in a university context. Studies of medical care education have shown that relationships are a core criterion for achieving favourable

learning outcomes among trainee doctors and nurses, underlining the central role of relationship-centred care in constructing caring relationships (Haidet and Stein, 2006). Care is relational, and thus it reciprocally influences the construction of high-quality teacher-student relationships (Dempsey, 1994). Confucian teaching also exemplifies the means of caring for others by engaging students in friendly dialogues and interactions (Shim, 2008). Establishing good relationships with students is viewed by teachers as a key construct of care (Weinstein, 1998), and the affective disposition is a cardinal element of genuine care (Tronto, 1993). Building high-quality teacher-student relationships that deal explicitly with the affective and intellectual dimensions of learning is an important part of strengthening students' learning experiences (Goldstein, 1999; Beard et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010). Caring teachers play a role in strengthening the relational and affective aspects of learning, and because affective aspects are not separated from their cognitive counterparts, teacher care also stimulates intellectual growth, creativity generation and independent problem-solving while closing the gap in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978; Diaz, Neal and Amaya-Williams, 1990; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Goldstein, 1999). Teacher care as expressed in the affective and emotional relations with students has played a primary role in students' holistic development (Ruus et al., 2007; McLaughlin, 2008), identifying care as a central thread connecting high-quality teacher-student relationships and their effects on intellectual development.

The transformative influence that teacher care has on students transcends a variety of learning contexts from pre-schools to universities (Foster, 2008). In the higher education context, teacher care has had positive effects on students' learning, class participation, academic engagement, motivation to perform, retention, self-esteem and well-being (Weinstein, 1989; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). Care also informs students' conceptions of the qualities held by an ideal teacher, in addition to the teacher's ability to provide clear explanations (Weinstein, 1989). In the primary and secondary school contexts, students' perceptions of teacher care have had transformative and positive effects on their attitudes, attendance, learning interest, engagement, motivation,

commitment to study, academic efforts, academic achievement, retention rate, pursuit of social goals and well-being (Phelan et al., 1992; Wentzel, 1997; 2002; Urdan and Schoenfelder, 2006; Foster, 2008). A decline in perceived teacher care among middle school students has led to a corresponding decline in academic motivation and achievement (Wentzel, 2002; Urdan and Schoenfelder, 2006). The effects of teacher care on students' well-being are especially significant. A study of high school students in the United States has revealed that students' descriptions of their academic challenges reflect optimism grounded in realistic assessments of their academic challenges when they experience their teachers as genuinely caring (Foster, 2008). Teachers are often seen by students as key non-familial role models, thus caring, supportive and positive relationships with teachers help students model their emotional well-being (McLaughlin, 2008). These findings have corroborated the positive effects of teacher care on students, but the implications for at-risk students are even more noteworthy.

Discussions about at-risk students have led us to appraise the pivotal roles played by academics' care in addressing students' emotional needs. Teacher care helps students cope with and reduce their negative emotions, such as feelings of loneliness and alienation, which are detrimental to their studies (Phelan et al., 1992). The at-risk students who are most likely be affected by emotional problems change their study attitudes and habits in remarkably constructive ways, adopting positive coping strategies, after having met teachers who really cared about them, despite untenable circumstances (Phelan et al., 1992; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Garza, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). A caring learning ethos cultivated by a caring teacher who is responsive to at-risk students' personal needs and struggles has been shown to have positive and transformative effects on at-risk students' engagement, motivation, retention and overall academic success (Garza, 2009). This, in turn, has substantiated the even more profound effects of academics' care on at-risk students' learning attitudes, habits, and ways of coping with mental health problems.

The significant role played by academics' care is founded on its contribution to the interrelated aspects of learning, development and well-being. According to Noddings' (1984) discussions on the caring construct in the ethics of care, the dynamics include motivational displacement, responsiveness, reciprocity and confirmation. Being engrossed in the motivational displacement for students (Noddings, 1984), teacher care helps cultivate high-quality, learner-centred teacher-student relationships that then improve university students' learning outcomes and increase their academic engagement (Haidet and Stein, 2006; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). A caring teacher who is concerned about and responsive to students, caters to their individualized needs, struggles and emotions, and customizes the learning support to help them achieve their goals, positively cope with learning difficulties and address mental health issues (Noddings, 1984; Phelan et al., 1992; Garza, 2009). Academics' care not only contributes to cultivating caring, learner-centred teacher-student relationships, but also establishing a beneficial caring learning context.

The importance of a caring and supportive learning environment is reflected in the fact that a caring, emotionally-secure classroom context can facilitate students' scaffolding. Too much or improper scaffolding is detrimental to learning and motivation, thus it must be tailored to students' skill levels, learning capabilities and willingness to participate (Urdan and Schoenfelder, 2006). When teachers are motivated by their care for students, they become more responsive to individuals' needs, providing customized learning guidance that facilitate appropriate scaffolding to support their learning. These aspects have facilitated the conception of academics' care as playing a central role by being responsive to students and customizing support for facilitating their scaffolding.

Caring, learner-centred teacher-student relationships established through academics' care have contributed to the creation of valuable bonds between teachers and students, and an emotionally-secure base that allows students to thrive during exploration and development. Discussions on classroom discourse have found that teachers who convey caring qualities in the learning context positively influence students' engagement,

motivation and willingness to take risks when acquiring knowledge (Urdu and Schoenfelder, 2006). This confirms the importance of providing students with a secure base, but more importantly, it implies that academics' care is the thread in connecting the affective and cognitive aspects of learning to close the gap in ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Diaz et al., 1990; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Goldstein, 1999), and the means by which secure bonds can be established to improve students' holistic development.

All of the aspects interact and contribute to students' learning, holistic development and well-being. Thus, academics' care plays a central role in students' educational and personal well-being, in addition to having profound implications for helping at-risk students and those who are susceptible to mental health issues. This will result in facilitating students to achieve their aspirations and promoting their well-being in universities and carried on to the future.

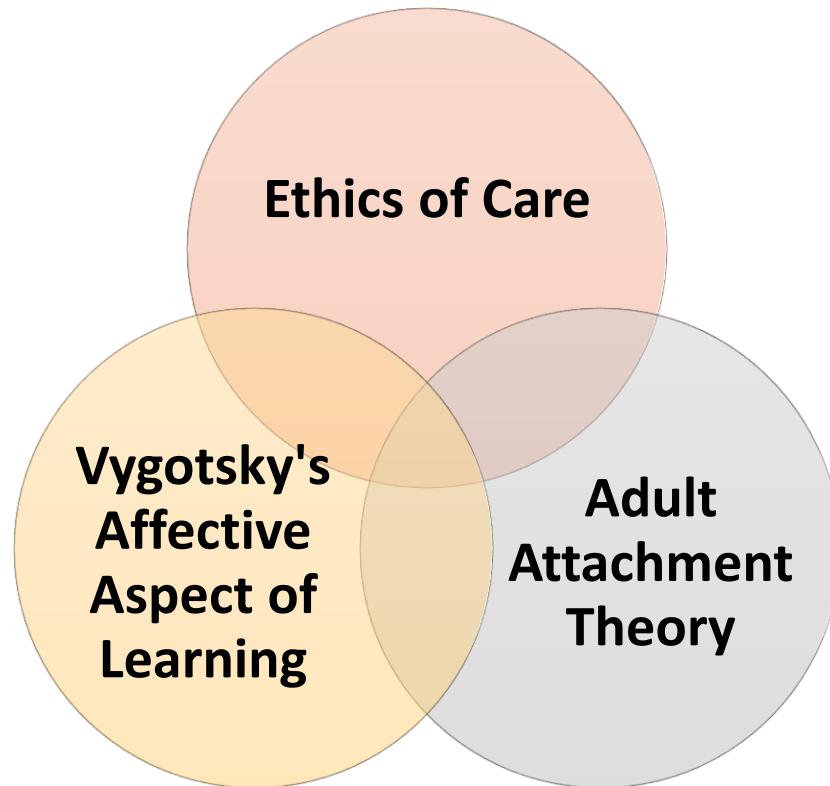
However, teacher care remains an under-researched and under-theorized area in educational studies, especially in the higher education context (Walker et al., 2006; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Although there have been studies on teacher care, the majority focused on the pre-school and school settings (Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Mariskind, 2014; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Care is regarded as a central purpose of teaching, rather than as a trivial component (Walker et al., 2006). Despite the desire for care being a universal need (Graham, 1983), conception and expectations of care can be subject to individual students' experiences (Garza, 2009). For example, differences have been observed between Latino and Caucasian high school students' perceptions of teacher behaviour in conveying care (ibid.). Moreover, teachers' perceptions of their caring actions and disposition may be perceived very differently by students (ibid.). Yet, there is a dearth of literature on university students' conception of academics' care in the Chinese context, despite the fact that culturally-responsive care has been recognized as important in pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Given that Chinese society is characterized as relational- and social-oriented, with special emphasis on relationships

(Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992), the cultivation of teacher-student relationships underpinned by academics' care may be even more significant in mediating a caring and supportive environment that improves students' learning, holistic development and well-being in the Chinese context. This argument is germane to the central theme of this thesis, which is to explore undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its pedagogical implications in Hong Kong universities. According to statistics from the Education Bureau (2016b), the majority of the undergraduate students in Hong Kong are local students. Thus, Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students are the focus of this research, which explores academics' care in the areas of research and pedagogy in the Hong Kong university context.

### **1.3. Conceptual Framework of the Thesis**

The literature has revealed the role played by teacher care in facilitating students' learning and holistic growth, and enhancing their well-being. Each aspect has been discussed in its own discrete unit, but they are dialectically related to each other through the thread of care in learning and development. Thus, a synthesis of ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory (Figure 1) is proposed in this thesis to explore students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care, and in relation to establishing caring teacher-student relationships, fostering a positive and caring social ethos, and serving as safe haven and secure base supporting learning, holistic development and well-being in the university context.

**Figure 1. Schematic Diagram for Theoretical Framework in this Thesis**



The ethics of care is the main conceptual foundation used in this thesis to explore care in a pedagogical context. Pastoral care, which plays a substantial part in the discussions on care in Western settings, may not be applicable to the Chinese context. Pastoral care, with its roots in Christian philosophy (Carroll, 2010), is not a very popular concept in Chinese culture due to Christianity not being the prevalent local religion. Paternalistic care may be more relevant, given the deeply-embedded Confucian teachings on the five cardinal relations in Chinese societies. Both teachers and students in Chinese societies are more likely to have conceptions and expectations of teacher care that are modelled on paternalistic relationships rather than pastoral care. Nevertheless, due to globalization and the internationalized context in the university setting, the faculty members come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and therefore hold different beliefs

about teacher-student relations in educational settings. Thus, paternalistic care may not be the only influence on students.

Care in the pedagogical context as represented in paternalistic care or pastoral care is distinct from the quintessential natural caring as in motherly love or the sacrificial love as commanded in GOD's agape (Noddings, 1984). Pedagogical care is not a command to care as in self-sacrificing and other-regarding form of love determined by the absolute relation to GOD, and as such teacher care is not a form of agape (ibid.). Moreover, academics' care in the higher educational context should not be blurred with natural caring (ibid.). This is in view that university education emphasizes scholarly rigour, arduous intellectual work, rational and logical reasoning, critical thinking and autonomous and self-directed learning (Rossiter, 1999; Clegg et al., 2006; Beard et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010; Mariskind, 2014), it is necessary to caution against turning teacher care as a form of vicarious parental love. On the other hand, the arguments for practising paternalistic care and pastoral care in the pedagogical context have strong undertones of morality and underpinnings of ethical basis. As such, teacher care has been advocated to be constructed on an ethical framework (Noddings, 1984). Thus, care practised in the pedagogical context with its moral dimension and ethical underpinnings can be expressed in and understood through ethics of care.

Ethics of care is generated by a twin sentiment of natural caring and ethical caring (Noddings, 1984). It is driven by our pursuit of being moral, and hence our striving for remaining in the caring relations and enhancing our moral ideal self as one-caring (ibid.). Featuring the relational quality as its essential attribute, it can be understood as a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and a concern for specific human relations instead of abstract principles (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Fine, 2007). It is then advocated as a set of principles guiding moral actions (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Fine, 2007). This premise has laid a sound foundation for looking into the one-caring's assumed responsibilities for the other people's well-being beyond natural care (Gilligan,



1982; Noddings, 1984). Considering teacher care is not parental love but originated from the sentiment of natural caring (Noddings, 1984), academics' care has also inherited the moral obligations as shaped by the particular socio-cultural context. This perspective facilitates our understanding and exploration of the roles of academics' care in promoting students' well-being and their learning and development under the specific context, and hence our contemplation of integrating academics' care into pedagogy to create caring experiences conducive to their holistic growth. Ethics of care, which is predicated on moral responsibilities, is thus used in this research.

Ethical care lays the moral ground work for academics to cultivate close, caring teacher-student relationships based on moral responsibility (Walker et al., 2006). The ethics of care has levered the intimacy of teacher-student relationships with the view that having and sustaining them will make students "better"; through retention, course success, career progress and reflection on teachers' abilities to help them to achieve more and at a higher level (ibid.). The action-oriented nature of ethical care, which has implications for motivating students to become better, more caring people, is in alignment with this thesis' objectives, which also concern students' holistic development. Students' ability to become more caring people is both an educational aim and a concern in this thesis. Noddings' (1984) ethical care provides conceptual discussions on care premised on moral obligations and in the pedagogical context, unlike the discussions in Mayeroff (1971) and Gilligan (1982) on care. Mayeroff's (1971) discussions in "On Caring" were more prescriptive and general while Gilligan's (1982) discussions on ethical care had feminist undertones concerning more about women's development, resulting in very general discussions on care in the pedagogical context. In contrast, Noddings' (1984) discussions on ethical care have been framed in the pedagogical context include the key constructs of ethical care applicable to educational settings. Responsiveness is considered one of the key constructs in Noddings' (1984) conception of ethical care, thus using ethics of care in the conceptual framework of this thesis acknowledges the significance of being responsive and culturally-responsive, as discussed by Ladson-Billings (2009) in addressing

individual students' needs during the learning process. Hence, ethics of care are used to frame the discussions in this research.

Vygotsky's discussions on the affective aspects of learning and adult attachment theory are also used to substantiate the conceptual framework of this thesis. Vygotsky's emphasis on the affective aspects of learning informs the conceptual foundation herein by focusing attention on exploring the importance of the relational zone as constructed by caring academics in the socially-mediated context to help students learn in the university context. To complement Vygotsky's discussions on the affective dimensions, ethics of care are also used to examine caring contact in the socially-mediated context. However, studies have not yet clearly addressed the subtlety and importance of emotional ties and attachments between academics and students in facilitating the latter's development. Considering this, adult attachment theory is used, as it provides a sound conceptual framework for exploring how having safe haven and secure base established in one's academic setting can allow one to thrive in independent learning and knowledge exploration. Despite that studies of adult attachment in educational context have examined the interpersonal dynamics between three interrelated aspects of human nature: attachment, academic empowerment and care-giving (Feeney, 2004), the extant literature did not clearly explore the attachment behaviour between teachers and adult learners. There is a dearth of literature looking into what kinds of caring behaviour will cultivate the felt-secure and attached feelings, and as such establish a safe haven and secure base for facilitating adult learners' exploration of knowledge and the world. In particular, what are the roles of academics' care in fostering the feelings of attachment in the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, as well as engendering the feelings of affection among the students in the socially-mediated university context? This research is premised on conceptualizing academics' care as the thread interconnecting the feelings of affection and attachment in facilitating students' learning and exploration. Thus, the framework of this thesis comprises synthesized views of

ethical care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment in exploring students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its implications.

#### **1.4. Nature of the Thesis**

Given the exploratory nature of this thesis, a qualitative research approach was used to achieve its purposes of gaining insights into undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences while drawing implications for the caring pedagogy in the higher education context. It addresses the dearth of research on academics' care and its pedagogical implications in the university setting in Hong Kong. In-depth interviews were the principal data collection method and thematic analysis was the main data analysis method. The students' experiences of academics' care through their daily contact with academics formed the empirical data informing this research. A thematic analysis then facilitated the identification of the overarching themes and sub-themes to gain insights into students' self-constructed meanings of academics' care, and their self-interpreted caring experiences in the university context. The pedagogical implications of academics' care were then drawn. Proceeding from the thesis' three main purposes, as discussed in the section "Rationale for the Thesis", the research explores six main research questions.

- 1) How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?
- 2) How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?
- 3) What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?

- 4) What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?
- 5) What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?
- 6) What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?

The data were collected from three main sources: in-depth interviews with students concerning their conceptions and experiences of academics' care in university, student write-ups of an exemplary case in which they experienced academic's care during their university study and the researcher's notes. The dialogues between myself and the final-year students were the major source of data. The intention was to provide the students who had experienced academics' care, with opportunities to voice their feelings and opinions. Their responses shaped the thematic analysis. Given that the literature is not very well-informed, the students' free expression of their views led me to expose an untapped terrain in relation to the students' perspectives of academics' care. The students' oral and written accounts provided information, opinions and concrete examples of how the students' constructed meanings and interpreted academics' care through daily interactions. The researcher's notes were kept to stimulate self-reflection on the dynamic interactions between myself and the students as a way of revealing the potential impacts on this research. Thus, a triangulation of methods was used to assess the qualitative data collected and ensure research vigour.

### **1.5. Contributions of the Thesis**

This thesis is expected to fill the gaps in the literature regarding conception of academics' care in the higher education context (Walker et al., 2006). A caring pedagogy is expected

to improve students' learning, holistic development and well-being. According to Neill's (1960, p.24) vision, "the aim of life is to find happiness, which means to find interest. Education should be a preparation for life". The discussions within and critiques of the literature prompt thought on how each framework informs conception of academics' care and its pedagogical implications, including each framework's shortcomings. In this thesis, three conceptual frameworks are examined: ethics of care in the pedagogical context, Vygotsky's affective dimension in learning, and adult attachment theory in the pedagogical context. This exploration of the literature in these disciplinary areas not only synthesizes conceptual assessments to explore and gain insights into students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its pedagogical implications, but also revealed the limitations of each discipline and hence the significance of transcending the traditional boundaries dividing different disciplinary areas. Given that Hong Kong is culturally different from the Western context in which most of the existing theories originated and developed, this thesis explores whether new insights into the proposed topic may be gained by synthesizing ethics of care, Vygotsky's discussions on the affective aspects of learning and adult attachment theory. As such, it is considered significant to enrich the knowledge involved in understanding academics' care in the growing internationalized tertiary education context.

There is a growing trend of internationally mobile students<sup>5</sup> in higher education context (UNESCO, 2016). The number of students pursuing tertiary education abroad has increased almost twofold to reach over 4.1 million students in 2013 from the 2 million university students studying abroad in 2000 (ibid.). This implies having two international students for every 100 students (ibid.). Six destination countries in particular hosted nearly one-half of total mobile students: the United States (hosting 19% of those students), the United Kingdom (10%), Australia (6%), Germany (5%) and Russian

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<sup>5</sup> "Internationally mobile students" refers to students who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin (UNESCO, 2016).

Federation (3%) in 2013 (ibid.). Despite that the traditional destination countries (namely the United States and the United Kingdom) remain strong pull for students, new destinations and regional hubs are competing for a share of internationally mobile students (ibid.). It also witnesses a trend that well-respected Western universities established international branch campuses in regional hubs, such as Singapore and Hong Kong (Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). This suggests a growing diversity of students in universities worldwide.

The growing diversity of students has posed new challenges to university educators. The academics may face new relational dynamics in their daily interactions with international students of diverse cultural backgrounds, which may be different from that with the Caucasian students in the traditional Western settings and as such affect teaching and learning. In view that teaching and learning are social and relational processes (Noddings, 1984; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Kim, 2007), this may imply the importance of implementing culturally-relevant teaching for achieving academic success and holistic development (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Researches on successful teachers have shown that they use an array of attitudes, practices and behaviour to create learning experiences underpinned by high-quality, learner-centred teacher-student relationships, and a core element of this relational approach is culturally-relevant teacher care (Rogers and Webb, 1991; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Hattie, 2003; Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sawatzky et al., 2009; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; O'Brien, 2010; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). This is in the light that conceptions and expectations of care are subject to individual students' experiences (Garza, 2009). This may lead the academics to ponder on pedagogical concerns, like what the most appropriate pedagogies are and what kinds of academics' care are expected, in order to facilitate teaching and learning for the benefits of the students of culturally-diverse backgrounds. Thus, the growing diversity of students in university setting has called for the attention to the importance of culturally-relevant teaching and care so as to accommodate students' needs and

expectations for enhancing their learning and holistic growth (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This has been germane to our study of Chinese students in the higher education context.

Studying Chinese students in the globalized higher education context is important for the researchers, educators, policy-makers and administrators to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese students' perceptions of care, and its implications for integrating care into pedagogy. This is in view that China tops the country of origin of internationally mobile students and recorded a total of 712,157 students studying abroad in 2013 (UNESCO, 2016). By understanding the Chinese students' expectations of academics' care, this will facilitate the academics and the parties concerned to think of how to integrate care into a culturally-relevant pedagogy and create a caring, warm, positive and inclusive atmosphere conducive to learning, in order to facilitate students' holistic growth and benefit their well-being. This deserves serious attention because Chinese educational systems privilege care as a central cultural starting point. Chinese society is relational- and social-oriented with special emphasis on relationships and communal regard (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992), the establishment of teacher-student relationships based on academics' care may be even more significant in mediating a caring and supportive environment that facilitates students' learning and holistic development while promoting their well-being in the Chinese context. This has thus underlined the significance of studying Chinese students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care within a higher education context and its pedagogical implications, which is the focus of this thesis.

This research adopted an exploratory approach to better understanding academics' care and its pedagogical implications. Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates furnished the empirical data on how students' conceptions of academics' care are informed by their shared daily contact. These data were also used in examining its implications for caring pedagogy in the university setting, and its role in enhancing students' learning, development and well-being. This not only provide insights into the actual practices of academics' care in the daily teacher-student interactions, but also help clarify any

misconceptions or misunderstandings about academics' care stemming from students' perspectives. Pedagogically, the results of this research contributed to revealing the roles and implications of caring teaching practices in higher education settings.

By clarifying students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care, this thesis informs present and future research on academics' care and the development of caring pedagogy in the higher education context. It is expected to catalyze the prospective research on academics' care and contribute to promoting caring pedagogy. More attention is also paid to the centrality of academics' care in the university context, which will in turn stimulate fresh dialogues among researchers and practitioners. Increased discussions and exploration will ultimately benefit the students.

## **1.6. Research Setting**

There are 20 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong, eight of which are funded by the public through the University Grants Committee (UGC) (Education Bureau, 2016a). My home university, one of the 20 degree-awarding institutes in Hong Kong, was selected as the research setting. It has been recognized for research, scholarship and for students' holistic development.

## **1.7. Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into six chapters. "Chapter 1 Introduction" presents the research and its background, then discusses the conceptual framework, nature, purpose and contributions of the research, and lists the research questions. "Chapter 2 Literature Review" examines three bodies of literature: ethics of care in the pedagogical context, Vygotsky's affective dimension of learning, and adult attachment in the pedagogical



context. These studies are discussed and critiqued to gain insights into academics' care and its pedagogical implications with the aim of constructing an original conceptual framework that synthesizes the mentioned areas of study. "Chapter 3 Methodology" discusses and justifies the qualitative research undertaken, with substantiated grounds for adopting a qualitative research design, purposive sampling as the means for selecting the interviewees, in-depth interviews as the main data collection method, thematic analysis as the main data analysis method and the measures taken to ensure research ethics and vigour. "Chapter 4 Findings" discusses the findings and identifies the salient threads and key themes connecting the different facets of students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care. This serves as the foundation for the in-depth analysis of academics' care and its pedagogical implications in the next chapter. "Chapter 5 Discussion" provides a conceptual analysis of the findings to decipher academics' care and construct a conceptual framework of caring pedagogy and its implications for everyday teaching practices in the higher education context. "Chapter 6 Conclusion" discusses the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the research in relation to its original purposes. Prospective research is suggested to gain further insights into the vast and meaningful field of academics' care and its pedagogical practices.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. An Overview of Literature**

The theoretical framework for this research encompasses ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory. It is predicated upon the premise that care is personally experienced and full of individual feelings conditional on the interactions between the one-caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009). It is an interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love (Weinstein, 1998), and a way of making connections for maintaining well-being through a web of relations (Tronto, 1993; Daly, 2002). Our proposed framework conceptualizes academics' care as a multifaceted and subtle construct that dialectically interrelates the affect and attachment base, influencing students' learning and development and promoting their well-being. It allows us to explore the phenomenon of academics' care from the students' viewpoints as informed by their daily contact with academics, and determine its pedagogical implications.

Discussions of caring work in the educational setting has historically reflected a feminine model (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Velasquez et al., 2013; Mariskind, 2014). Caring work in a pedagogical context has been framed in the literature by a binary gender opposition (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Mariskind, 2014). An over-emphasis on a feminine model of pedagogical care undermines our understanding of academics' care from students' perspectives (Walker-Gleaves, 2009). The question central to this thesis is how students conceptualize academics' care, as informed by their daily contact with academics and its pedagogical implications. Basing our framework on a feminist construct would over-emphasize the gender binary in our views of caring work, limiting our understanding of academics' care from students' viewpoints. Students' narrative accounts are central to our understanding of their

conceptions of academics' care, independent of our pre-conceived ideas. As such, a constructive paradigm would pre-determine our approach to the phenomenon of academics' care in this thesis. Care is personally experienced at the individual level as a result of interactions between the one-caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009). Academics' care comprises multiple realities as constructed by students' conceptions, which are informed by their lived experiences with caring academics. Thus, discussion of the feminine model of care is not included in the literature review. This research approaches academics' care from students' experiences as located in care, affect and attachment.

Thus, I present a dialectical framework that synthesizes ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory in the pedagogical context. Vygotsky's (1978) discussion underlines the inseparability of the affective and cognitive aspects of students' learning and development. It recognizes the significance of integrating ethical care and affect in facilitating students' development (Goldstein, 1999; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). However, this approach has not yet addressed the importance of creating a secure base for students to return to in their exploration and development, as a result of the dialectical influences of care and affect on students. The missing piece is proposed in this research by introducing adult attachment theory into the discussion. This provides us with a framework to explore how the affective aspect of learning and an attachment base are interconnected through the thread of care and exert dialectical influences on students' learning, development and well-being. Considering the Vygotskian emphasis on the importance of the socially-mediated context for students' development, teacher-student relationships cannot be reduced to a pedagogical matter but should be treated as a socio-cultural construct embedded in a specific context (Li and Du, 2013). Thus, a synthesized discussion of ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment contextualized within the Chinese context frames the literature review that follows.

## 2.2. Definitions of Care and Pedagogy

Being a value-laden concept concerning human experiences, care<sup>6</sup> implies deeper layers of meanings in contemporary discourses (Fine, 2007). Care in the modern English language has numerous connotations, including “worry”, “concern” and “responsibility” on the one hand, and “love” and “charity” on the other (ibid.). According to the *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2016), care as a verb means 1) “to feel that something is important and worth worrying about”; and 2) “to like or love somebody and worry about what happens to them”. As such, “to care” expresses the act of being concerned, worrying or loving (Fine, 2007). Care as a noun is defined as: 1) “the process of caring for somebody/something and providing what they need for their health or protection”; and 2) “attention or thought that you give to something that you are doing so that you will do it well and avoid mistakes or damage” (*Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, 2016). Care also implies a state of intense attention and support, indicates anxiety and concern, and is referred to as specialized support (Fine, 2007). Apart from the linguistic discourses, care can be analyzed from a dispositional (Tronto, 1993; Daly, 2002; Fine, 2007), relational (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993; Daly, 2002; Fine, 2007; Kim, 2007), moral (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984), feminist (Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007) and socio-political perspectives (ibid.). Care emerges not as a discrete or self-contained aspect of social life, but as ubiquitous acts pervasive in every facet of life (Fisher and Tronto, 1990; Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). Thus, the definition of care is inevitably equivocal subject to the political, social, cultural and feminist contest (Fine, 2007).

Pioneering research on caring work has concerned unpaid, informal family care (Finch and Groves, 1983; Daly and Lewis, 2000) while the feminist studies of care have laid the foundation for its study by addressing the deeply-entrenched gendered divide in caregiving and its devalued social role in patriarchal societies (Gilligan, 1982). However,

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin word for care is “Cura”, from the mythical Greco-Roman deity “Cura”, indicating opposing characters: both a burdensome responsibility that drags people down and the power by which humans achieve their true potential (Reich, 1985 cited in Fine, 2007).

feminism is not the main conceptual framework adopted in this thesis, as the gendered perspective on care falls short of addressing the intricate issues encountered in the pedagogical context. The feminist stance is focused on the oppression of women in the male-dominated world, and the relegation of caring work to a domestic context for which women are held responsible, rather than a public sphere run by men in a patriarchal society. This parochial focus on binary confrontation between females and males in feminist studies has reinforced the entrenched but single-faceted gendered association of women with caring work. The result has been an over-simplification of reality into a dichotomy between females and males. This, in turn, has overlooked the elaborate constructs of care and the multifaceted challenges faced in providing it in contemporary societies where it is contested on different politico-cultural fronts due to power imbalances between vested parties and weaker parties (Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). The power struggle between males and females is only one of those fronts (ibid.).

In addition, discussions on care in social policy studies have been politicized through the politico-cultural system. The definitions of care givers in national statistics, research documentation or government policies have reflected the political struggles when care went public, and as such are inevitably resulted in serving certain groups of carers and legitimizing certain meanings while obscuring and repressing the others (Fine, 2007). The politico-cultural views have focused on devalued and marginalized care-giving inherited from traditionally-institutionalized care-givers' roles in the domestic and private realms of modern societies (Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). The gradual shift of caring work from the private sphere to the public sphere, and this boundary-crossing has interfered with neat compartmentalization, so that the dominant and vested parties feel threatened and no longer in control (Tronto, 1993). Caring work has then been degraded as sub-stratum for "normalizing" and fortifying the dominance of the powerful (ibid.). Such politico-cultural contest has led to the under-valuation of care and caring profession in public domains such as in the higher educational context. Nevertheless, the social policy studies of caring work have its shortcomings, specifically in relation to pedagogy. It politicizes issues of

caring by dichotomizing the confrontation between dominant and weak parties, which shapes the institutional forces involved in the provision of care. In view of the strong political undertones in politico-cultural argument which may distract our attention from students' everyday caring experiences in the pedagogical context, this argument will not form the main theoretical framework in this thesis.

Care is related to the mental disposition of concern for and taking charge of the well-being of others (Graham, 1983; Fine, 2007). It involves the cognitive and emotional aspects of human experiences, such as being aware of and acting on others' concerns and needs (Graham, 1983; Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). On the dispositional plane, it encompasses two sets of meanings: a positive concern for another and the resultant performance of tender acts of kindness (Fine, 2007) and a negative sense involving worry, control, self-sacrifice and acceptance of burdens (Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). Nonetheless, considering care from this dispositional perspective alone fails to grasp the rich tapestry of practices and sentiments (Tronto, 1993).

Care also involves ongoing concerns, connection and protection in thought and action, all of which are interrelated and directed towards some ends (Tronto, 1993). This suggests that care can be conceptualized as two cognitive sequences moving from thought to action, rather than two distinct domains (Tronto 1993; Fine, 2007). The expression "to care for" is action-oriented, and refers to the physical activity of helping someone or something (Fine, 2007). Care, however, is neither disposition nor action, but a fusion of the two (Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). It is a mutual engagement that is completed when the cared-for recognizes and expresses reciprocity (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993). This is at odds with the conventional literature, which has largely described care as an attitude or disposition. Regarding its pedagogical significance, if caring is a merely an attitude or personal trait, then it cannot be developed as a pedagogical practice.

Care, moreover, indicates an ideal while depicting a reality (Fine, 2007). Being a vision of what can be achieved, care is normative and contested (ibid.). It functions as a social value transcending its narrow focus on giving care to another person to promoting a broader societal concern, serving as the ethical basis of care for guiding our life (Tronto, 1993; Fine 2007). However, Tronto's (1993) discussion of ethics in her caring framework is rather implicit, and not as explicitly advocated as in the ethics of care proposed by Gilligan's (1982) and Noddings' (1984). On the other hand, the normative discussion of care implies that social actors will construct their own views and expectations of care as shaped by the particular socio-cultural context, and this will in turn influence their psycho-social experiences of care. This has led us to adopt a constructive paradigm in exploring the university students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care.

On the other hand, Finch and Groves' (1983) portrayal of care as labour of love implies personal commitment and identification as expressed in the core argument for caring work as a calling and construct of identity, and this is in contrast to Graham's (1983) discussion of depersonalized care (Fine, 2007). Graham's (1983) depersonalized care addresses the social phenomenon when caring work has shifted from private domain to public sector in the politico-cultural system, and hence the separation between "caring about" and "caring for" on emotional plane. However, Graham's (1983) argument is not without faults. Graham's (1983) notion appears to be predicated on binary opposition in delineating "caring about" and "caring for" in an absolute sense. In reality, "caring about" ranges from a degree of intensity, rather than just "caring about" or not at all. To illustrate, two persons can be both "caring about" and undertake the duties of "caring for", but one person can be really "caring about" the cared-for, but another one can be only slightly "caring about" the care recipient. Likewise, care has been identified as an essential quality that distinguishes outstanding teachers from good ones (Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1989; Goldstein, 1999; Hattie, 2003; Kim, 2007; Bauml, 2009). Good teachers are those equipped with rich subject knowledge, strong communication skills and excellent teaching competences (Weinstein, 1989; Wentzel, 1997; Cortazzi and Jin, 2001;

Hattie; 2003). However, it does not mean that good teachers do not care about the students at all. They do care about them, otherwise they will not strive for teaching well and be considered good teachers. Considering this, Graham's (1983) binary delineation of "caring about" and "caring for" derived from the discussion of menial caring work may not fully address the complexity and subtlety of academics' care in the university context. This has led us to transcend our parochial views of looking into teacher care as an either-or approach to exploring academics' care from a broadened view of being a degree of intensity inherited in psycho-social dynamics of caring experiences as influenced by the teacher-student relationships under the particular socio-cultural context.

In this regard, definitions of care have been underpinned by the relational construct (Kittay, 1999; Fine, 2007). Care is considered an expression of social relationship between one-caring and cared-for (Daly and Lewis, 2000; Daly, 2002; Fine, 2007). As such, it is necessary to recognize the nuanced but significant differences in seeing and experiencing care in each of the caring encounters as influenced by the particular social interactions and relationships, and hence the different ethical judgments passed on care as shaped by the specific social contexts (Bowden, 1997; Fine, 2007). This suggests that the caring experiences and emotions generated are subject to the customized interactions and individualized relationships contextualized to the particular social contexts (Fine, 2007). This also implies that the psycho-social state involving in the specific caring encounters, and the meanings and boundary of care, are subject to the continuous mutual construct, negotiation and re-construct between one-caring and cared-for (*ibid.*). These views have shed light on the significance of taking the psycho-social dynamics and socio-cultural context into account when exploring how teachers and students construct and negotiate academics' care, and its meanings and boundaries.

The premise of care being an expression of social relationships with an emphasis on its relational quality lies in that care is not a material thing and the cared-for is not a passive object (Fine, 2007). The cared-for are active social agents who have their disposition and



volition in choosing to establish and sustain the social relationships, and in acting to respond to the attention and care received during the process of relationship building (ibid.). This is in contrast to the feminist and Tronto's (1993) portrayal of care recipients, who are generalized as the needy and the minor, as the passive and dependent objects involving only one-way transaction (Fine, 2007). Care is a social phenomenon that is constructed and re-constructed by the actions and interactions between the one-caring and the cared-for, so that its meanings are dynamic (ibid.). This implies that the caring experiences, and as such the construct and negotiation of care and its meanings and boundaries, are subject to the specific relational dynamics and psycho-social disposition contextualized to the particular socio-cultural environment. This has made the definition of care and the construct of boundaries in caring encounters inherently fluid, blurred and ambiguous as influenced by the relational dynamics in that particular situational context.

Nevertheless, there is a dearth of literature on teacher care examining the agency role of students in establishing and sustaining the relationships with teachers, or in constructing and negotiating the caring experiences and its boundaries. Noddings' (1984) discussion of the cared-for's part in acknowledging the receipt of care in completing the caring cycle may be an exception. However, Noddings' (1984) view on motivational displacement in ethics of care is still focused more on the one-caring's perspective, rather than looking into the dynamic agency relationships or the active construct and negotiation of care between the one-caring and the cared-for. Thus, this has been germane to a research gap for exploring the agency roles of university students, who are autonomous and self-directed adult learners (Knowles, Holton III and Swanson, 2005; Noe, 2010), in actively constructing, negotiating and re-constructing the academics' care, and its meanings and boundaries, with the academics as influenced by the particular teacher-student relationships under the specific socio-cultural context.

Care is an action-generative process (Mayeroff, 1971). Mayeroff (1971) envisaged care as a generative process in which the essence of genuine care facilitates growth. This

premise has laid a sound foundation for conceptualizing academics' care as a means of facilitating students' holistic growth in the pedagogical context. This is aligned with MacLntyre's (2002) vision of education, in which students are shaped into good people who enjoy the quest for knowledge, use their creativity to improve society, appreciate people's contributions to humankind and critique dominant contemporary institutional and moral systems. Teaching should be considered in relation to a broader perspective that nurtures students' holistic development and well-being, rather than remaining confined by the parochial transmission of subject knowledge. This has far-reaching implications for academics' roles and responsibilities in helping students grow and self-actualize themselves, far beyond rote learning (Noddings, 1984). However, teacher care remains an under-researched and under-theorized area in educational studies, especially in higher education settings (Walker and Gleaves, 2016).

In this thesis, care is explored in the pedagogical context primarily by means of Noddings' (1984) ethics of care. This is driven by the fact that the feminist and politico-cultural perspectives may lead to overlooking the caring work occurred during day-to-day teacher-student interactions that facilitate students' learning. Both approaches run the risk of creating a reductionist trap in which everything is explained by feminist oppression or politicized institutional systems. This narrow focus is inadequate to address the pedagogical concerns of academics' care, or capture its complexity and subtlety. On the other hand, ethics of care, with its moral underpinnings and obligations for the well-being of the others and hence its serving as guidelines for moral actions (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Fine, 2007), is considered appropriate for exploring academics' care in the pedagogical context. Noddings (1984) was the first advocate for integrating ethics of care into formal curricula to address moral issues. As Noddings (1984, p.70) states, "when we look at 'pedagogical caring' we shall begin not with pedagogy but with caring". Thus, Noddings' (1984) ethics of care is used in this research as one of the main conceptual frameworks for exploring care in the pedagogical context.

Regarding pedagogy, we adopt Giroux and Simon's (1989) broad definition that it is both a socio-cultural experience and a relational process. According to Giroux and Simon (1989, p.239), pedagogy is:

"A deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations. It can be understood as a practice through which people are incited to acquire a particular 'moral character'. As both a political and practical activity, it attempts to influence the occurrence and qualities of experiences. When one practices pedagogy, one acts with the intent of creating experiences that will organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world in particular ways. What we are emphasizing here is that pedagogy is a concept which draws attention to the processes through which knowledge is produced".

This definition is predicated on the premise that teachers are engaged in pedagogy, even when they represent themselves in a particular way or appear to engage in non-instructional behaviour, such as smiling at or showing appreciation for a student (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This broad definition supports reflection on why certain acts of teacher care help students become more academically successful (ibid.). It also facilitates the exploration of the action-oriented, long-term implications of teacher care for supporting and encouraging students to use their knowledge to make sense of the world and improve it (ibid.). This premise is aligned with the core belief of this thesis that caring pedagogy contributes to exerting an influence on students' becoming caring individuals and passing on care to the others. Thus, Giroux and Simon's (1989) broad definition of pedagogy is used in this research.

## **2.3. Care in the Pedagogical Context**

### **2.3.1. Care and its Pedagogical Implications**

Teacher care is not the panacea of good teaching. Good teachers are identified as those equipped with deep subject knowledge, excellent teaching techniques and strong communication skills (Weinstein, 1989; Wentzel, 1997; Cortazzi and Jin, 2001; Hattie, 2003). Technical competence nevertheless is not sufficient to qualify them to become excellent teachers (Weinstein, 1989; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Sander et al., 2000; Hattie, 2003). Care is an essential quality that defines outstanding teachers and enhances meaningful learning, beyond the foundation of technical competence (Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1989; Goldstein, 1999; Hattie, 2003; Kim, 2007; Bauml, 2009). Good teaching in higher education cannot be reduced to techniques or knowledge transmission (Sander et al., 2000; Fitzmaurice, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Caring teachers are motivated to do their best to facilitate students to reach their full potential and maximize their chances of success (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Kim, 2007; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Facilitating students to see and develop their own strengths, goodness and desirable qualities is a highly-regarded caring practice (Rossiter, 1999). As Rogers and Webb (1991, p.174) put it, “good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of teaching”. The centrality of academics’ care has thus been recognized.

Care is an action-oriented process that facilitates the holistic growth of the cared-for (Mayeroff, 1971). Studies of teacher care across different learning contexts from pre-schools to universities have consistently found that the influence of teachers’ caring work on students is transcending and far-reaching (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Foster, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Teacher care contributes to cultivating a caring, close, learner-centred teacher-student relationship, which exerts positive effects on university students’ learning outcomes, academic performances and achievement, class participation, study engagement and motivation and retention rates (Lopez and

Gormley, 2002; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Jacklin and Robinson, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Warwick et al., 2008; Mervis, 2013; Velasquez et al., 2013). Caring teacher-student relationships also exert positive influence on university students' emotional state and resilience for coping with stress, challenges and frustrations, and hence promote their self-efficacy, self-esteem and well-being (Kenny and Rice, 1995; Lopez, 1997; Franklin et al., 2002; Lopez and Gormley, 2002; Edwards and D'Arcy, 2004; Haidet and Stein, 2006; Brady and Allingham, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Velasquez et al., 2013). This reflects the pedagogical centrality of care in a university context.

Studies of at-risk students have led us to further appraise the significance of academics' care in transforming students' learning and promoting their well-being. Studies conducted in different cultural contexts and school settings have attested that at-risk students experience positive, transformative changes in their study attitudes, habits and coping strategies after experiencing teacher care, despite difficult circumstances (Phelan et al., 1992; Rossiter, 1999; Barber, 2002; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Garza, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Caring teachers' responsiveness to individual needs and struggles has exerted profound effects on at-risk students' engagement, motivation, retention and school success (Garza, 2009), especially those who have experienced high levels of deprivation (Barber, 2002). Likewise, postgraduate students consider professors' care helpful and comforting in problematic, conflictual or stressful situations (Rossiter, 1999). Caring teachers are responsive and cater to students' learning needs, struggles and emotions, customizing their support to help students achieve their goals and cope with difficulties and mental health issues (Noddings, 1984; Phelan et al., 1992; Garza, 2009). These studies substantiate the central role of academics' care in facilitating students' learning, holistic development and well-being in a university context.

More importantly, teacher care has been recognized as having far-reaching effects on university students' lives. Caring teachers have been found to effect transformative changes on students and inspire in them a greater sense of purpose than the mere pursuit

of career-oriented competences and skills (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Tompkins, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Hyland, 2010). Students are more likely to become a caring person and care about other people after experiencing teacher care (Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006). Care thus creates a virtuous cycle of caring about one another. This research rebuts the claim that care was just a therapeutic discourse (Ecclestone, 2004; Ecclestone et al., 2005). Noddings (1984, p.70) states that “the teacher, I shall argue, is necessarily one-caring if she is to be a teacher and not simply a textbook-like source from which the student may or may not learn. Hence, when we look at ‘pedagogical caring’ we shall begin not with pedagogy but with caring”. The importance of teacher care has been recognized as a critical component of education (Kohn, 1984; Noddings, 1984; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). However, an over-emphasis on either the affective or the cognitive aspect of education is detrimental to university students’ learning and holistic development (Hyland, 2010). For this reason, this research proposes that academics’ care should be a synthesis of affect, attachment and cognition. Hence, ethics of care is discussed below.

### **2.3.2. Ethics of Care and its Pedagogical Practices**

Ethics of care serves as a prototype for care-giving in a professional context (Noddings, 1984), and has been proposed as a pedagogical concern (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1998). In this regard, Noddings’ (1984) advocacy for applying ethics of care to the pedagogical context is noteworthy. Ethics of care is generated by a twin sentiment of natural caring and ethical caring (Noddings, 1984). Ethical responsibilities and relationships are intrinsic to teacher care, and central to what a caring teacher is (Kim, 2007). Ethics of care is thus adopted in this thesis as the prototypical framework for exploring academics’ care in a university context.

Ethics of care is a caring attitude, a sense of moral obligation and volitional acts committed to caring practices for the good of the cared-for (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1987; Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007). It is non-judgemental and originates from the pursuit of moral goodness based on equity for enhancing the moral ideal of self, rather than on rigid moral principles or universal moral laws (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Goldstein, 1999; Rossiter, 1999; Kim, 2007). Though it is not itself natural care or an ethical principle (Noddings, 1984), it engenders compassionate and responsive behaviour which results in moral behaviour (Walker-Gleaves, 2009). It is a long-term, reciprocal and inclusive commitment, reaching out to others and expecting their growth and enhancement (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Friedman, 1993; Larrabee, 1993; Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007).

Ethics of care is motivated by a desire for relating to and receiving others, and remaining in caring relationships of receptivity, responsiveness through engrossment, motivational displacement and reciprocity (Noddings, 1984; Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007). Receptivity refers to the one-caring's feeling with the cared-for and being open to the resulting pleasure or pain (Kim, 2007). The one-caring accepts the other not as an object but as another himself/herself; and this generates strong responsibility for the cared-for (ibid.). Engrossment is defined as the distinctive state of receptivity (ibid.). It concerns the one-caring's total attention to the cared-for during the caring encounter (Kim, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008), which Buber (1965) describes as the firmament enclosing teacher and student. Such a total absorption facilitates motivational displacement. Motivational displacement refers to the one-caring's willingness to give primacy to the cared-for's needs and motivation to internalize the cared-for's goals as his/her own realities; this results in an action-oriented drive to act on behalf of the cared-for (Tappan, 1998; Kim, 2007; Velasquez et al., 2013). Reciprocity is reflected in the cared-for's acknowledgement of the one-caring's care (Tappan, 1998; Kim, 2007; Velasquez et al., 2013). It indicates the completion of the full caring cycle (Noddings, 1984; Tappan, 1998; Kim, 2007). It also

plays a key role in determining whether the caring act is considered meaningful or not (Kim, 2007). It then serves as the impetus for maintaining the caring work (ibid.).

Ethical care calls for stepping out of one's own frame of reference, engrossing oneself in others' feelings and being motivated to act ethically and morally (Noddings, 1984). Empathy as generated by care provides perceptiveness in discerning individual learners' unique needs (Goodman and Goodman, 1990). However, Noddings (1984) sees empathy as inadequate, because it objectified an individual by analyzing one with objective detachment. This subtle nuance reveals Noddings' (1984) over-emphasis on a gendered dichotomy between feminine and masculine views predicated on feminist constructs. This may complicate and mislead our study of students' conceptions of care and empathy.

Moreover, Noddings indicates the completion of care by the acknowledgement of care by the cared-for, which serves as the stimulus for the one-caring to maintain the caring work (Noddings, 1984; Kim, 2007). This argument is fallacious. Affect is a cardinal construct in genuine caring work; and together with the intrinsic commitment to care, it transforms a depersonalized job into genuine caring work (Graham, 1983; Tronto, 1993; Fine, 2007). However, students may not comprehend or appreciate that teachers' toughness is in fact for their good, and hence may not immediately appreciate teachers' caring work. Consequently, this study questions that the one-caring will not be motivated to continuously care about the cared-for if the former does not receive acknowledgement from the latter. As discussed, genuine caring work transforms work tasks into a true commitment to care. This thesis thus proposes that a genuine caring academic continuously cares about students, even if students do not acknowledge the care. Genuine academics' care is unrequited.

The practice of ethical care in a pedagogical context is encouraged by teachers' concerns for students, as driven by the pursuit of moral goodness and ideal moral image (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). It guides teachers to make ethical decisions about instructions,



curriculum and relevant pedagogical concerns, and act ethically to facilitate students' holistic growth and promote their welfare (Noddings, 1984; Rogers and Webb, 1991). Moreover, driven by the responsiveness and motivational displacement intrinsic to ethical care, teachers are responsive to individual students' learning needs and difficulties and customize their teaching accordingly. As with other agency relationships in caring work (Daly 2002), students actively negotiate and re-construct care with academics, rather than remained a passive social agent. Students bring their own conception and past experiences of care to the classroom, and this shapes their expectations of teacher care (Noddings, 1984). This contrasts with Tronto's (1993) claim that the cared-for is a passive recipient of care without active co-construct of relationships or negotiation of actual caring work. Admittedly, Tronto's (1993) argument focuses more on care in the public sector and concern about marginalized groups such as minors and the needy. Fine's (2007) emphasis on agency roles, in contrast, helps us grasp students' active role in negotiating and re-constructing academics' care.

### **2.3.3. Limitations of an Ethics of Care in the Chinese Context**

Despite Noddings' (1984) ethics of care being extensively applied to studies of care in a pedagogical context, there are still limitations to Noddings (1984) and Gilligan's (1982) frameworks. Both Gilligan's (1982) and Noddings' (1984) arguments have a feministic perspective, concerning women's marginalized role in a society dominated by masculine moral discourses. Addressing academics' care only from a feminist viewpoint fails to envisage the complexity of caring work in pedagogical context, which goes beyond the dichotomy between masculine and feminine constructs of moral ethics. In addition, applying ethics of care to the Chinese cultural context must take distinctive cultural constructs into consideration to gain insight into academics' care in a Chinese setting.

Ethics of care is founded on inclusiveness; the Chinese conception of care involves exclusiveness. Both Noddings (1984) and Tronto (1993) conceptualize care as circles of

caring relationships that move out from the central ring to the outer ones in decreasing order of closeness. Noddings' (1984) conception of relational chains may seem akin to that of Chinese social relationships, which have also been conceptualized by Fei (1992) as a web of concentric social circles, in which he calls a, "Differential mode of association"<sup>7</sup>. However, there are fundamental differences between the two. Ethics of care is inclusive, aiming to sustain a web of social connections in which no one is left alone (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Fine, 2007). This is in contrast to Fei's (1992) account of the differential concentric circles of relationships in the Chinese context, which are exclusive. Individuals have a strong attachment to in-group members (namely family, kin and close friends) while showing an absolute indifference to out-group members (such as strangers or acquaintances) (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). Thus, care is not for constructing undifferentiated social relationships that benefit the entire relational web. Care, in the Chinese conception, is the privileges and preferential treatment reserved for in-group members to consolidate the relationships among in-group members while discriminating against out-group members. This has profound implications for developing close teacher-student relationships through academics' care in order to let students consider academics as in-group members. Once academics are seen as in-group members, students will develop attachment bonding with them, and they will be made privy to students' personal needs and difficulties. Thus, this research proposes that academics' care is central to building teacher-student relationships and attachment bonds to facilitate students' learning and development and promote their well-being.

Both the ethics of care and the Chinese conception of care emphasize the limitations of universal moral laws in caring work; yet their philosophical underpinnings are fundamentally different. Care in Western societies is predicated on universal moral laws

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<sup>7</sup> Fei (1992) put forward the concept of "*chaxugeju*", a differential mode of association with the ego at the centre, in which every person is connected with one another in a network of elastic, extendable rings of concentric circles, spreading out from close kin to acquaintances; this egoistic construct of the social relationship network results in interconnected rings of personal connections, in which one's own network of concentric circles overlaps with another person's self-constructed egoistic social network; every individual in connection with other persons in Chinese society.

and equality (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Ethical care proposes an ideal of care premised on the feminine model of equity, and is driven by the pursuit of moral goodness and the moral ideal of the self (ibid.). In contrast, care in the Chinese context is not driven by universal moral laws or equity. A person's social roles determine one's moral obligations and responsibilities, as there is no universal moral law, value or standard in Chinese society (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). The Confucian ideal of moral obligations and rules are discriminatory and emphasize givers' and receivers' socially-structured, hierarchical roles, along with their relations as governed by *Wu Lun* (ibid.). Each of the particular relations in *Wu Lun* is subject to specific sets of moral standards in each situated and relational context (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Yan, 2009). Fulfilment of one's relational obligations addresses one's psycho-social needs, which leads to developing positive self-identity (Wang and Song, 2010). According to *Wu Lun*, the senior assumes role obligations and responsibilities for giving care and protection to the junior, who will, in turn, show respect for and obedience to authority (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996). Caring for others and especially for the junior beyond natural care in the Chinese context is "institutionalized" by the social obligations stipulated by *Wu Lun* (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). Resources are not allocated based on fairness, but on the degree of closeness in the web of interconnected social relationships (ibid.). Thus, giving and expectations of care and protection are shaped by people's social roles and obligations, and the socially-constructed ideal self-image in the Chinese context, in contrast to the Western conception of universal moral principles or equity. This may shape university students' conceptions of academics' care in a Chinese setting.

Hierarchical and differential social relationships in a Chinese context do not mean that there is lack of care, in contrast to the conventional Western conception of care predicated on equality. According to *Wu Lun*, the prototypical teacher-student relationships are modelled on the hierarchical father-son dyad in the Chinese context (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996; Yan, 2009). Teachers are expected to assume the surrogate role of father, and teacher care is akin to paternalistic care in

Chinese society (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). Teachers are seen as supportive fathers, in addition to having a stern fatherly image (Bond, 1991; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). The patriarchal image of the father figure is kind, respectful and authoritative, though somewhat strict, distant and self-restrained (Bond, 1991). Teacher-student relationships are imbued with responsibility, respect, acceptance, warmth and affect (Biggs and Watkins, 1996), despite being hierarchical. In view of the distinctive cultural construct, hierarchical relationships in Chinese society have connected teachers and students together and contributed to developing close teacher-student relations conducive to learning (Li and Du, 2013). Hierarchical teacher-student relationships are not considered morally-problematic in Chinese society; yet, it is problematic when the senior fails to live up to the high moral standards and obligations expected of the social roles (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). Thus, Gilligan's (1982) arguments that hierarchical relations are morally-problematic and inherently-unstable may not apply to the Chinese context.

Despite divergent ideological constructs, ethics of care is compatible with the Chinese conception of care in a pedagogical context. Moral character cultivation is central to Chinese teaching (Bond, 1991; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). Teachers are expected to act as moral exemplars, showing how to become a whole person with character and integrity through good conduct, self-cultivation and acting on moral principles and obligations for the collective good (Biggs and Watkins, 2001; Gao and Watkins, 2001; Shim, 2008). They are expected to assume facilitator roles, mentoring students in exploring and co-constructing knowledge, individualizing teaching methods according to students' characters and needs, coaching them in coping with learning challenges and engaging in friendly dialogue with them in long-term reciprocal learning relationships (Shim, 2008). In contrast to the compartmentalized Western view of teaching, Chinese teachers conceptualize their roles as extending beyond the classroom to include students' personal and familial affairs, and see each context as requiring different individualized responsibilities and responses (Biggs and Watkins, 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). These

aspects of Confucian teaching overlap with ethical care in the pedagogical context. Thus, the integration of ethical care in pedagogical practices in the Chinese context, in which students have been instilled with Confucian thought, appears to be compatible. The strong emphasis on relational-oriented, hierarchical social relationships with clear in- and out-group delineation in the Chinese context has also led us to consider the importance of cultivating close teacher-student relationships through academics' care and its pedagogical implications for students' learning and holistic development.

The pedagogical implications of ethical care in the Chinese context have not yet been fully explored. This is a research gap this thesis aims to fill. Considering that ethical care is the prototype for care-giving in a professional context (Noddings, 1984), it is adopted here as a conceptual construct for synthesizing two other frameworks, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory, for exploring academics' care.

#### **2.3.4. Care and its Pedagogical Qualities**

Despite the significance of care, theories of the qualities of teacher care are ambiguous. In general, a collaborative learning environment characterized by a caring ethos of warmth, pleasantness, friendliness, trustworthiness and responsiveness has been recognized as contributing to facilitating students' learning and development in different cultural settings (Noddings, 1984; Chan and Watkins, 1994; Goldstein, 1999; Lee, 2004). The literature has described teacher care in the essential aspects of teachers' disposition, relationships and pedagogical practices in a university context (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999; Fjortoft, 2004; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). These qualities are not exclusive to each other, but overlap with and reinforce one another in constructing teacher care.

Respect and recognition have been identified as significant dispositional attributes in teacher care in a university context (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999; Fjortoft, 2004; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). Recognition is more than just noticing students (Rossiter, 1999). It involves showing active concern for students and their personal lives, paying full and meticulous attention to them, understanding and validating their feelings and concerns and prioritizing their needs as one's own (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999; Fjortoft, 2004; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). Caring teachers care about each student, value him/her as a distinctive and whole person worthy of caring, and are concerned about cultivating individual development (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Zhang, 2007). For example, Lee's (2004) study of post-secondary vocational students in Hong Kong shows that effective teachers care about students as individuals, understand their difficulties and guide them in their learning and personal development. Moreover, expressing encouragement and praising students' achievements are important aspects of care (Zhang, 2007; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). This underlines the significance of feeling affirmed in constructing meaningful care among university students (Rossiter, 1999). Empathy, fairness and an approachable, welcoming and reassuring attitude are also important dispositional qualities in teacher care (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009).

In addition, relational quality is a key construct of teacher care in a university setting. Biggs and Watkins (2001) have found that Hong Kong Chinese students appreciate teachers who teach with heart and desire a closer and caring teacher relationship. Trust is pivotal to a relationship (Buber, 1965) and central to teacher care (Goodman and Goodman, 1990). Attitudes of trust, acceptance, inclusion and openness are important for establishing caring teacher-student relationships (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). Thus, relational qualities, as constructed by teachers' passion and establishment of trust, are vital in teacher care.

Further important pedagogical qualities include accountability, responsiveness, learner-centred pedagogy and developing a caring ethos for learning to take place. Accountability is being responsible for students' learning and attending to the whole instructional process (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). Moreover, listening to students, being sensitive and responsive to their learning needs and difficulties, providing customized accommodations, giving constructive and encouraging feedback and following up are important pedagogical attributes (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fjortoft, 2004; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Creating an inclusive, safe, supportive and caring learning ethos featuring accountability, responsiveness, accommodation and feedback is also important (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). In contrast to the conventional view that care is related only to the emotional domain, pedagogical concerns and instructional qualities are salient features of teacher care in a university context (Lee and Ravizza, 2008).

Teacher care is especially subtle, sophisticated and complex in a university context (Kim, 2007; Mariskind, 2014). University students are adult learners, who are autonomous and self-directed (Knowles et al., 2005; Noe, 2010). In view of their developmental level, university education focuses on developing students' scholarly rigour, arduous intellectual work, logical reasoning, critical thinking and rational objectivity (Rossiter, 1999; Mariskind, 2014). Teacher care in university is thus more than showing compassion to students, monitoring them or solving problems for them. It is a delicate balance of affect, support, critical curriculum design, assessment and pedagogy, in addition to toughness and control for the good of the students in the university context (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Mariskind, 2014). For example, caring professors design learner-centred curricula and teaching methods in response to students' backgrounds, experiences and needs through understanding them (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Hermeneutic and meaningful dialogues between teachers and students are essential to get to know one another through relational knowing; this is

achieved through teacher care (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl and Minarik, 1993; Kim, 2007). Buber (1965) emphasizes that teacher-student dialogues are not limited to literal conversations, but extend to the dialogical lives in which the two parties interact. As such, care is required of teachers in terms of the time and effort entailed in caring for students (Mariskind, 2014), knowing them through establishing caring relationships (Kim, 2007), and the subsequent cognitive process of thinking, reasoning and problem solving (Noddings, 1984; Tappan, 1998; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). From such a perspective, teacher care involves knowing students in-depth as distinctive individuals; the epistemological aspect of teaching is achieved through caring relationships established with students via teacher care (Kim, 2007).

Teacher care in a university context is thus not just an affective or emotional concern, but a synthesis of relational, epistemological and pedagogical engagement with students through caring relationships (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Kim, 2007). This not only calls for attention to the affective and emotional domains among students through teacher care, but perceptive discernment, analytical contemplation, sound judgment, rational reasoning and critical thinking (Mariskind, 2014), through genuine caring about students as driven by engrossment and motivational displacement in ethical care (Noddings, 1984). Academics' care is an interplay of academics' caring disposition, affect and cognition in discerning students' needs, difficulties and concerns, and customizing pedagogical strategies and support to cater to them. This challenges the parochial gendered construct of care and contests the marginalization of care in universities (Mariskind, 2014). Teacher care in the university context involves a critical cognitive process, decisions and acts, and cannot be reduced to emotionally reflexive behaviour or infantilizing students, which is a risk of therapeutic discourse. The apparently divergent realms of the affective and cognitive aspects of care are connected through the consciousness and critical thinking intrinsic to pedagogical care. This demonstrates that teacher care is rational and legitimizes pedagogical practices in the university context (Walker-Gleaves, 2009).



Pedagogical qualities of care are thus aligned with Goodman and Goodman's (1990) discussion of caring teachers' facilitator roles predicated on Vygotskian theory. Conceptually, this shows that teacher care is compatible with the Vygotskian emphasis on the inseparability of affect and cognition. Pedagogical care in a university context from this perspective is best approached from a socio-relational perspective (ibid.). Thus, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning is discussed below.

## **2.4. Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning**

### **2.4.1. An Overview of Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning**

The nature of interpersonal transactions and their effects on intrapersonal learning and developmental processes are central to Vygotskian theory (John-Steiner and Soubberman, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Learning is a socially-mediated process facilitated by the dialectical interactions between social agents (namely teachers and students) in a situated socio-cultural environment, where intellectual and social lives interfaced (Vygotsky, 1978). As such, development is a continuous process of qualitative transformation and internalization of knowledge resulting from the dialectical and intertwined influences of cognition and affect in a mediated social context (John-Steiner and Soubberman, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) coined the term, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), to describe children's potential development in a mediated social context to recognize the important role of experienced adults in the transformation process (John-Steiner and Soubberman, 1978). ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).

In view that this thesis aims to explore the pedagogical implications of academics' care, our discussion focuses on the role of teachers rather than that of peers.

Vygotskian theory of social transactions sheds light on the interconnection of affect and cognition in students' learning and developmental processes (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999). Teacher-student interactions tap into the affective domain. This serves as an emotional-motivational drive to stimulate guided participation<sup>8</sup> and scaffolding<sup>9</sup>, leading to cognitive development, intellectual stimulation, co-construction of knowledge and meaning, and application of internalized knowledge to subsequent independent problem-solving, and hence closing the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Diaz et al., 1990; Goodman and Goodman, 1990; Hedegaard, 1990; McNamee, 1990; Moll, 1990; Tudge, 1990; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Tappan, 1998, Goldstein, 1999). The inseparability of cognition and affect under the mediation of experienced adults is underlined (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999). This shows that teacher care and its influence on affect are central to students' cognitive development (Walker-Gleaves, 2009).

#### **2.4.2. Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning and Care in the Pedagogical Context**

Caring teaching is predicated on a socio-relational view of pedagogy (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Tappan, 1998; Edwards and D'Arcy, 2004; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). Tompkins (1996) indicates that students release their initiatives, creativity, energy and dedication when they know they can express themselves freely, in sharp contrast to learning within a restrictive environment. Care plays a pivotal role in creating such a caring and congenial context for students to thrive in learning and development. Tappan (1998, p.32) states that "Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology advocates, at its core, a caring, relational,

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<sup>8</sup> Guided participation includes modeling, instructing, discussion, questioning and feedback (Hawk and Lyons, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Scaffolding focuses on how teachers link students' previous contributions to new knowledge, request students to elaborate on their ideas, restore direction to discussion, and rework students' contributions (Kim, 2007).

dialogical process as the key to good learning". Relational qualities are central to care, generating affect which acts in dialectically with cognition to stimulate students' guided participation and scaffolding, resulting in intellectual growth, co-construction of meanings, creativity generation and independent problem-solving, and hence closing the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Noddings, 1984; Diaz et al., 1990; Goodman and Goodman, 1990; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Tappan, 1998; Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). It is not the subjects themselves that induce critical thinking during the learning process, but how the subject knowledge is taught, and how students are encouraged to learn (Goldstein, 1999; Noddings, 2003). As such, Noddings (1984, p.178) advocates that "the one-caring as teacher, then, has two major tasks: to stretch the student's world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world". Teachers must attend to and promote an affective climate while teaching, to enhance students' learning and transform them through the developmental process. Care thus exerts dual effects on interconnecting the affective and cognitive domains in facilitating students' learning, in addition to mediating a caring learning ethos for them to learn.

Goldstein (1999) discusses the integration of ethical care into a Vygotskian framework. Teacher-student encounters during the learning process are comparable to caring encounters in ethical care (Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007). Caring teachers are sensitive, receptive and responsive to individual students' needs, feelings, interests, capabilities and goals, engaging them in relevant experiences to stretch their capabilities, providing customized and appropriate feedback, and guiding and keeping track of their development (Noddings, 1984; Goodman and Goodman, 1990; Rogers and Webb, 1991; Kim, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). These acts, driven by engrossment and motivational displacement in ethical care, are considered essential to stimulate learners' scaffolding in ZPD (Kim, 2007). This reflects the centrality of care in interconnecting the affective and cognitive aspects of learning, and hence closing the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Diaz et al., 1990; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Goldstein, 1999; Hawk and Lyons, 2008). This is not just

limited to a school setting; it is also applicable to university context. Teacher care has been found to exert positive influence on university students' cognitive and holistic development through effecting affective and emotional drives in teacher-student relationships (Haidet and Stein, 2006; Ruus et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010). Attending to the dialectical influences of ethical care and the affective aspect of learning is thus important for facilitating students' learning (Beard et al., 2007; Hyland, 2010).

#### **2.4.3. Limitations of Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning**

Nevertheless, Vygotskian framework has not yet fully applied to studying the integrated, dialectical roles of care and affect on students' learning and development in different cultural settings. Likewise, the extant studies on Vygotskian approach and care mainly involve a school setting. They have not yet clearly addressed adult learners' needs or characteristics in relation to the effects of care and affect on learning in a university context. This research gap is one we seek to fill in exploring academics' care in the university context by applying Vygotskian framework. This thesis proposes that care is the central thread in interconnecting relational and affective constructs and influencing university students' learning and development.

Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of the affective aspect of learning provides us with a framework for exploring the part played by academics' care in cultivating caring relationships with students, and creating a caring socially-mediated context for facilitating their learning and developmental processes. Vygotskian approach has so far been mainly applied to studies of children's learning and development, rather than addressing adult learners' needs contextualized to their developmental stage. This thesis proposes the importance of interconnecting affective and cognitive domains in students' learning and developmental processes in addressing their unique learning needs during university study. Having approachable faculty members and establishing positive relationships with

them have been found to contribute to an effective learning context for university students (Donahue, 2004; Yazedjian et al., 2007). This is corroborated by a study that medical students are more effectively engaged in the learning process when their emotional and affective domains are tapped into (Johnson-Farmer and Frenn, 2009). Likewise, Walker-Gleaves (2009) has stressed that a dual Confucian-Vygotskian framework supports a set of coherent actions legitimizing caring relationships. This implies that the affective domain in the relational zone as mediated by teachers is significant in facilitating university students' learning and developmental processes. Nevertheless, most of these discussions focus on the integration of affective and cognitive domains in pre-school and school settings, rather than in a university context. We thus explore the effects of affect as constructed by academics' care on university students' learning and development, taking into consideration their unique needs and the difficulties they encounter in university study.

Likewise, Vygotskian framework has rarely been applied to non-Western societies, such as Hong Kong and China. Research in non-Western settings has indicated the significance of the teacher's roles in arousing learners' interest and engaging them in the learning and developmental processes through tapping into their affective domains. According to Wong and Tang's (2012) study of the use of games as teaching aids in a postgraduate hotel and tourism management class in Hong Kong, the subject lecturer plays a crucial role in facilitating students' learning and mastering of the practical application of theoretical concepts. The enthusiastic lecturer plays a vital role in personally demonstrating the games, guiding the students to play the games, creating an encouraging atmosphere, and providing detailed debriefing after the games (Wong and Tang, 2012). This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the importance of adults' role in stimulating learners' affective domain and cultivating a positive social context for them to learn in. In addition, teachers in the traditional Chinese context are seen as surrogate father. Students are expected to show respect for and submit to them (Bond, 1991; Li and Du, 2013); and teachers are expected to provide protection and care to their

students (Bond, 1991). Students may expect teachers to extend care and protection to them. This may place the affective aspect of learning even more centrally, and affect may play an even more important role in facilitating students' learning in a Chinese context.

Confucian teachers are more receptive to students' needs and characters, and hence act mindfully, individualize their teaching methods and contemplate critically the continual effects of their teaching in response to students, to make their teaching relevant to each learner for character cultivation (Shim, 2008). Confucian teaching also exemplifies the means of caring by engaging students in friendly dialogues and interactions (ibid.). This has led to the argument that Confucian teaching is compatible with the relational epistemologies intrinsic to pedagogical care.

However, arguments for applying Confucian teaching to the Hong Kong university context must be treated with caution. The universities in Hong Kong are international; and the faculty in Hong Kong universities come from different countries and are of diverse cultural backgrounds. The faculty members' paradigmatic thoughts may not be shaped only by Confucianism. The application of Confucian arguments to academics' teaching paradigms and practices needs to be performed with caution. As such, Confucian teaching is referred to, but not adopted as the principal conceptual framework in this research. Nonetheless, the majority of undergraduate students in Hong Kong are Hong Kong Chinese. Their conceptions and expectations of academics' care are probably shaped by Confucian thoughts. Thus, Confucian influences on students' notions and expectations of academic care should be taken into consideration in the analysis of findings and discussions in this thesis. For this reason, we seek to fill the research gap concerning Hong Kong university students' conceptions of academics' care by exploring the topic from their points of views.

Within a university context, the focus of Vygotskian theory on social learning in a specific mediated context may limit our understanding of students' multifaceted ways of learning. Vygotskian framework's emphasis on adult mediation in a specific context may be

because the original study concerned children's learning, seeking to develop them into cultured persons with a culturally-approved social demeanour (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 1990; Tudge, 1990). Considering this, it has implied that the socialization process is intertwined with their learning and developmental processes, even though socialization is not discussed separately by Vygotsky. Thus, Vygotsky's theory appears reductionist, reducing learning to guided participation and scaffolding in adult mediation and social learning. This has obscured the multifaceted aspects of affect and care in facilitating learning and development among university students, who are adult learners. Consequently, adult learners' characteristics must be taken into account to fully appreciate the centrality of academics' care in facilitating university students' growth.

University students construct their identities as independent and autonomous young adults (Clegg et al., 2006). Adult learners are autonomous, self-directed and goal-oriented; they must understand the reasons for learning before engaging in it, adopt a problem-centred approach to learning, and are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Knowles et al., 2005; Noe, 2010). The autonomous characters of adult learners are substantiated by Vygotskian theory that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge moulded by teachers; they actively negotiate, co-construct and re-construct knowledge and meanings with teachers during the learning and developmental processes (Goodman and Goodman, 1990). Considering these distinctive characteristics of adult learners, this suggests that teachers' "Physical" presence in the contextual environment may not always be required to stimulate university students' learning and development. This does not mean that the affective and relational aspects of teacher-student interactions are not important in facilitating university students' learning, but that university students may engage in self-exploration in their learning and developmental path. Vygotskian theory has shown that teachers play an important role in establishing social relations outside classrooms to effect changes among students and facilitate their application of classroom knowledge to comprehending social reality (Moll and Greenberg, 1990). However, Moll and Greenberg's (1990) study was conducted in a

school context and within the framework of social connections between teachers and students, rather than addressing students' own exploration and self-development. As such, Vygotskian theory may not be able to fully capture the multifaceted and subtle roles of care in contributing to university students' independent pursuit of knowledge and exploration. Thus, this thesis uses adult attachment theory to address the complex and subtle roles of academics' care in influencing the affective domain, in addition to serving as a safe haven and secure base for university students to return to whenever they are in need of help during their exploration and development.

Bringing forward the discussions on adult attachment theory leads us to address the two shortfalls of the Vygotskian framework. First, Vygotsky's (1978) theory falls short of addressing the differences between children's and adults' learning. University students as adult learners are expected to be autonomous and goal-oriented, so as to direct their own learning (Knowles et al., 2005; Noe, 2010) and engage in exploration and development on their own. Hence, social learning may not be the sole catalyst in university students' developmental process. This is not to refute the important role of teachers in mediating learning in a specific social context, but simply to acknowledge that adult learners' learning and development are different from children's. The "Physical" presence of teachers in a mediated social context may not be indispensable in university students' learning and developmental processes. This has led us to explore university students' learning, exploration and development beyond the classroom context.

Secondly, Vygotsky's (1978) theory does not clearly outline the influence of affect on students' well-being during the learning and developmental processes. The effects of the dialectical influences of care and affect on students' social and emotional growth have been described (Goldstein, 1999; Bauml, 2009). Nonetheless, Vygotskian theory has not clearly addressed the effects of teachers' mediating roles on influencing the affective aspect of learning and cultivating a relational zone for students' well-being during the learning and developmental processes. Teachers' interactions with students, and the



ensuing effects on their sentiments and psychological states, can promote or dampen students' well-being. The importance of relating accounts of students' affective aspect of learning to their well-being is reflected in the proposition that learning in a university context is a holistic experience closely entwined with physical and emotional states and social relations (Beard et al., 2007). This implies the dialectical influence of cognition, affect and emotional state on students' learning and developmental processes, and hence on their well-being. This also indicates the significant pedagogical implications of the affective aspect of learning through caring work for promoting students' well-being, which is crucial to their holistic growth.

This research proposes that academics' care is the thread interconnecting the affective and cognitive domains in positively affecting students' academic success, development and well-being. Adult attachment theory has thus provided us a basis for addressing the important multifaceted and subtle roles of academics' care in serving as an attachment base in facilitating students' learning and development beyond the classroom context and without the "Physical" presence of caring academics. As a result, adult attachment theory is discussed below.

## **2.5. Adult Attachment Theory**

### **2.5.1. An Overview of Adult Attachment Theory**

While Vygotskian approach focuses on teachers' role in the affective aspect of students' learning within a socially-mediated context, adult attachment theory (Riley, 2009) addresses teachers' role as a safe haven and secure base for students to explore knowledge and to return to whenever they face adversity. Bowlby (1977, p.201) defines attachment theory as "a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms of

emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression and emotional detachment, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise". Children form attachment bonds with significant adults (Riley, 2009). Apart from familial members, teachers, being older and wiser and charged with legal and ethical responsibilities for their students, are considered important care-givers and significant adults in attachment bonding (ibid.).

In an educational context, attachment theory concerns the interpersonal dynamics between three interrelated aspects of human nature: attachment, exploration and care-giving (Feeney, 2004). The attachment system is activated most strongly when facing adversity and distress (ibid.); while exploration occurs when attachment needs have been satisfied (Feeney and Collins, 2004). Attachment and exploration alternate in healthy individuals (Bowlby, 1977). When individuals are confident that an attachment figure will be available and responsive when needed and called upon, they feel secure enough to explore the environment, take on challenges and make discoveries (Feeney, 2004). A highly-secure person will explore and move away from the attached base for ever-increasing distances and durations, yet always maintain contact and return (Bowlby, 1977). The importance of care-giving thus lies in providing a safe haven to meet the attached person's needs for security, feelings of comfort and alleviation of stress, and a secure base to support one's autonomy and exploration (Bowlby, 1988; Feeney, 2004; Feeney and Collins, 2004). As such, caring teachers who act as safe haven facilitate students to resolve problems so as to effectively restore their felt security when needed (Feeney, 2004; Feeney and Collins, 2004). Serving as a secure base means caring teachers are always available and respond to students when needed, in addition to discerning how to intervene appropriately to facilitate and support students' exploration and holistic growth (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1988) elaborates on the concept of a secure base:

"In essence this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary. In these respects it is a role similar to that of the officer

commanding a military base from which an expeditionary force sets out and to which it can retreat, should it meet with a setback. Much of the time the role of the base is waiting one but it is nonetheless vital for that. For it is only when the officer commanding the expeditionary force is confident his base is secure that he dare press forward and take risks” (Bowlby, 1988, p.11)

The attachment figure thus plays a primary role in providing a safe haven and secure base for individuals to return to in search of support and guidance when they face adversity and are in need, and as a result promotes exploration (Bowlby, 1977; Kenny and Rice, 1995; Feeney, 2004; Feeney and Collins, 2004; Riley, 2009).

One distinctive feature of adult attachment is adults’ ability to derive comfort from security, and the knowledge that their attachment figures can be contacted if needed (Hazan and Shaver, 1994). This has major implications for university students who are adult learners. Considering adult learners are autonomous and self-directed (Knowles et al., 2005; Noe, 2010), independent learning and exploration are an integral part of their learning and developmental processes. This implies that cultivating felt security among students is important so that they may freely, independently and confidently explore knowledge and the world (Buber, 1965). As such, adult attachment theory underlines the role of caring professors in cultivating feelings of comfort, and establishing a safe, secure and congenial context for building a trusting, respectful and open teacher-student relationship; and hence facilitating students’ exploration of new ideas, ability to learn from mistakes and holistic development (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999). By synthesizing ethics of care with Buber’s (1965) emphasis on the centrality of trust in caring teacher-student relationships, the importance of care-giving in adult attachment is further revealed (Feeney, 2004; Feeney and Collins; 2004).

Ethics of care is a total encounter and commitment. As Buber’s (1965) word “firmament” implies: the firmament is non-selectively present to all students whenever they seek out teachers, transcending the limits of time (Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1998). This reflects

the alignment of ethical care and the provision of a secure base in adult attachment. Academics as good care-givers are not supposed to resolve problems for students, or interfere in their growth by depriving them of opportunities for trial and errors. Thus, the importance of having a caring academic is not limited to creating congenial teacher-student relationships for facilitating students' guided participation and stimulating scaffolding within a mediated social context. It also involves serving as a safe haven and secure base for students to move away from in the process of exploring, making mistakes and learning from them, and to return to whenever they are in need, so as to achieve holistic growth. This underlines the importance of synthesizing ethics of care with adult attachment in facilitating students' exploration and holistic growth.

The significance of teacher care in serving as a safe haven and secure base and its profound effect on students' learning, development and well-being cannot be overestimated. Secure teacher-student relationships contribute positively to university students' academic performances, willingness to take on academic challenges, intellectual exploration, risk-taking, academic resilience, positive coping strategies, stress and emotional coping, social integration and institutional attachment, and are negatively related to stress, academic-related anxieties and early dropout (Kenny and Rice, 1995; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Lopez, 1997; Franklin et al., 2002; Brady and Allingham, 2007; Lopez and Gormley, 2002). When university students feel a lack of teacher care, they suffer from feelings of vulnerability, frustrations, insecurity and uncertainty, hold defeatist attitudes and are more likely to give up (Rossiter, 1999; Hawk and Lyons, 2009). These negative emotions divert their energy away from learning to self-focus (Rossiter, 1999). As such, it is especially important to address at-risk students' destructive emotions and defeatist attitudes by establishing feelings of comfort through teacher care (Rossiter, 1999; Hawk and Lyons, 2009). A caring, warm, nurturing, benevolent and empathetic teacher establishes affective and felt-secure relationships with students, and hence acts as an attachment figure and safe haven for students' emotional needs (Pistole, 1999). This is corroborated by the finding that quality teacher-student relationships may not

protect children from academic failure, but still serve as strong encouragement and contribute to building resilience among students, who learn that academic failure is part of a more profound learning journey (Pianta et al., 1995). Teacher care is the key element in such relationships (Noddings, 1984; Goldstein, 1999). This substantiates this research's proposition that academics' care serves as a safe haven and secure base for supporting and facilitating university students' autonomy, exploration and well-being.

### **2.5.2. Limitations of Adult Attachment Theory**

Theories of adult attachment have not clearly addressed how teachers can become students' safe haven and secure base. Care-giving as discussed in the adult attachment literature appears to be an everyday practice; the literature does not address what kinds of care and care-giving behaviour are essential, effective and appropriate for academics to express towards students in the pedagogical context. Yet, theories of care indicate that students are more likely to feel safe with and open up to caring professors who respect, accept, attend to and treat them as valued individuals worthy of caring (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Kim, 2007). This thesis thus proposes a synthesized theory of care, affective aspect of learning and adult attachment to shed light on how academics can become students' safe haven and secure base through academics' care.

Discussions on care, and especially reciprocal care, raise questions about Noddings' (1984) discussion of students' reciprocity in caring teacher-student relationships. According to Noddings' (1984) discussion of ethics of care within a school setting, a student's acknowledgement of care and expression of appreciation is sufficient to reciprocate care to a teacher as the one-caring. In contrast, university students, who are young adults, are autonomous and self-directed (Knowles et al., 2005; Noe, 2010) and exert agency power. This suggests differences in reciprocity and reciprocal care as expressed by pupils in a school setting and students in a university context. This also implies that verbal

acknowledgment and expression of gratitude may not be regarded by university students as an adequate means to return favour and reciprocate care to academics. University students may actually extend help and express care to academics as a way to reciprocate. In such a case, will reciprocity and reciprocal care among university students involve more than the attitudinal or verbal level? Will reciprocity and reciprocal care require concrete actions and hence extend beyond attitudinal level to the behavioural level? Will reciprocal care be expressed in university students' concrete acts of returning favours and extending help to academics?

Riley's (2009) discussion of reciprocal care in adult attachment theory may shed light on these queries. Riley (2009) indicates that the adult attachment model of reciprocal caregiving and care-seeking is a more appropriate lens through which to view teacher-student relationships than the traditional uni-directional model. Reciprocity between the one-caring and the cared-for is a distinguished feature of adult attachment (Hazan and Shaver, 1994). Students care about caring teachers who matter to them, even when caring relationships and actions are not fully reciprocal (Rossiter, 1999). Riley (2009) has for this reason underlined the importance of reciprocal care in adult attachment in his study of teachers' attachment to student teachers. Because Riley's (2009) discussion focuses on the effects of reciprocal care on pre-service teachers' career choice, attachment, prospective social relationships and future work context, it may not be totally applicable to this research which aims to explore the role of academics' care in facilitating undergraduate students' learning and development and promoting their well-being. Moreover, Riley's (2009) discussion touches on students' reciprocal care, but does not further elaborate reciprocal care from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Nevertheless, Riley's (2009) view sheds light on the importance of reciprocal care in adult attachment, which illuminates for our exploration of Hong Kong university students' conceptions of academics' care. Considering Riley's (2009) framework focuses on reciprocal care from the viewpoints of the teacher (the one-caring), this thesis approaches reciprocal care from the perspectives of the students (the cared-for). By doing this we

hope to fill the current research gap to explore students' conceptions of academics' care, including reciprocal care and its pedagogical implications. This thesis thus proposes that academics' care is bi-directional, a two-way flow between academics and students, rather than a one-way, uni-directional flow from academics to students.

### **2.5.3. Adult Attachment in the Chinese Context**

Despite Bowlby's (1969 cited in Wang and Song, 2010) claim that attachment theory is universal, attachment organization has been found to be influenced by cultural differences (Pistole, 1999). In contrast to an individualist Western cultural setting (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Wang and Song, 2010), Chinese adult attachment is relation-based and context-specific (Wang and Song, 2010). This is because social relationships are relation-oriented in collectivist Chinese societies, with distinctive in- and out-group delineation (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Hofstede et al., 2010; Wang and Song, 2010). The concepts of self, significant others and relationships are inseparable entities in Chinese culture (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Wang and Song, 2010). Consequently, individuals' perception of their relative social positions and closeness to other social actors in the web of differential social relationships are fundamental how they relate to each other and act properly (ibid.). This cultural difference shapes the development of a specific attachment base in a Chinese setting (Wang and Song, 2010), and substantiates our proposition that Chinese students are selective in choosing specific academics to become a safe haven and secure base, carefully differentiating the selected significant other from others.

Wang and Song (2010) maintain that an internal sense of trust towards significant others might not be the most prominent factor affecting Chinese adults' attachment styles and behaviour, because Chinese society is relation-oriented. It is undeniable that relationships play a fundamental role in determining the closeness of relations and the

ensuing social obligations. Nonetheless, it is doubted that trust is not a prominent factor in Chinese attachment. Buber (1965) has stressed the importance of trust in teacher-student relationships. Trust is also considered central to teacher care and caring teacher-student relationships (Goodman and Goodman, 1990; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Rossiter, 1999; Lee and Ravizza, 2008). In view of this, our research proposes that trust and relationships are intricately intertwined, dialectically influencing and reinforcing each other in attachment bonding and predicated on relation-oriented differential social relationships in a Chinese setting. This study acknowledges that the socially-structured web of differential relationships pre-determines the initial socially-framed closeness of relations, social obligations, social propriety in interactions, and degree of trust. Nonetheless, the continuous interactions and cultivation of mutual, bi-lateral social relationships will either further develop or undermine trust. Trust and relationships gradually, mutually and dialectically influence and reinforce each other in social interactions. Trust is undermined if the senior fails to live up to the expected social obligations of providing care and protection, or if they cheat or betray the junior. Thus, this thesis proposes that socially-structured relationships under *Wu Lun* may be the initial determinant in forming an attachment base. Trust may already be pre-determined by in-group relationships and socially-determined obligations. With continuous interactions and mutual, bi-lateral development of social relationships, trust is either further developed or undermined. Although relationships may be the initial prominent factor, the continuous flow and development of teacher-student relationships means that trust and relationships are intricately intertwined and dialectically reinforce each other in building and sustaining attachment bonds in the Chinese context.

In addition, Wang and Song's (2010) emphasis on relation-based attachment styles and behaviour overlooks individuals' agency power in negotiating and re-constructing social relationships. Social actors in a Chinese context still have agency power in dialectically negotiating and constructing the degree of closeness in social relations with others in the web of differential social relationships (Fei, 1992). In view of this, Wang and Song's (2010)



discussion seems reductionist, reducing the subtle and sophisticated structures of adult attachment to pre-determined relations governed only by *Wu Lun*. This study acknowledges the importance of socially-structured relationships in determining the initial construct of social relations in the Chinese context under the influence of *Wu Lun*. As such, this thesis proposes that the determinant factors of an attachment base in the Chinese context are an intertwined and dialectical interplay between trust and relations as shaped by socially-structured relationships, rather than being rigidly governed by *Wu Lun*. This exerts an influence on Chinese attachment, and in particular on choosing who is regarded as an attachment base in the learning context.

However, the significant others' feedback is influential and profound in a Chinese context (Wang and Song, 2010). An individual only discloses private information and makes privy the personal information to in-group members in Chinese society (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). This has far-reaching implications for cultivating caring teacher-student relationships and attachment bonding with students to help them regard academics as in-group members. Academics perceived as in-group members best serve as a safe haven for helping students positively cope with emotional stress, and a secure base for supporting them to positively cope with study difficulties and personal problems. This is especially important in the Chinese context, because the Chinese are reluctant to seek professional counselling, because of traditional stigma around it and the collective shame it may bring to the whole family (Bond, 1991). Consequently, exploring adult attachment in the Chinese context helps us gain insight into the importance of academics' becoming students' safe haven and secure base to help them positively cope with their emotional problems and promote their well-being. This is not to deny the role of formal student counselling. We also need to be cautious against falling into the trap of therapeutic discourse. Nevertheless, it is necessary to seriously consider integrating academics' care into pedagogy for helping students, especially at-risk students, positively cope with challenges and problems, preventing them from going astray, encouraging them to persist with their studies, and

promoting their well-being. The pedagogical implications of academics' care in the Chinese university context are therefore important to explore.

Apart from that, Chinese people have a long-term orientation towards relationships, and expect these relationships and the reciprocity intrinsic to them to last for the long term (Bond, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010). Reciprocity, which is termed *Bao* (returning of favour), is a long-term orientation, involving the expectation that social debts and favours will be returned in the distant future (ibid.). As such, will students return favours and reciprocate care to caring academics in the present, or will this occur in the future? Likewise, will students expect to receive academics' care in the distant future after their graduation? Goldstein's (1998) discussion of the termination of teacher-student relationships upon the end of term may not fully reflect the situation in a Chinese context. The official contact and in-class teacher-student relationships end; yet genuine caring teacher-student relationships are not severed by the end of term. In view of the Chinese long-term orientation towards relationships (Bond, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010), a genuine caring teacher-student relationship most likely will become an everlasting one. This implies that the establishment of an attachment bond serving as a safe haven and secure base will occur in the context of students' long-term view. In other words, they may return to caring academics to seek advice and help in the future when they face adversity or are in need, if the caring academics have engendered a feeling of care and felt security by serving as a safe haven and secure base. Our argument is predicated on a synthesized theory of care, adult attachment and the long-term orientation of Chinese society. However, Riley's (2009) discussion does not address the prospective attachment bond between teachers and student teachers for the students to return to whenever they face difficulties in the future, apart from discussing the effects on career attachment. Similarly, Noddings' (1984) and Goldstein's (1998) discussions fall short of addressing the transcendence of caring teacher-student relationships in attachment bonding. This is a research gap this thesis aims to fill by exploring attachment bonding and reciprocal care

from a long-term view based on a synthesized theory of care, adult attachment, Vygotskian relational dynamics and the distinct long-term orientation of Chinese society.

Adult attachment provides us with a framework for understanding the central role of academics' care in cultivating a safe haven and secure base, and hence contributing to students' learning, exploration, holistic development and well-being. However, adult attachment theory has not yet been widely applied to the pedagogical context as suggested by Riley (2009), and has yet to be synthesized with Vygotsky's (1978) affective aspect of learning in our understanding of the role of academics' care in students' learning. Thus, this research proposes that academics' care plays a central role in cultivating caring teacher-student relationships for effecting the affective aspects of learning and establishing attachment bonding to serve as a safe haven and secure base, so that students thrive in their learning and development.

## **2.6. Synthesis of the Ethics of Care, Vygotsky's Affective Aspect of Learning and Adult Attachment Theory in the Chinese Cultural Context**

This thesis proposes a conceptual framework in which Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory dialectically influence and reinforce each other in facilitating students' learning, development and well-being, through the central work of academics' care. Adult attachment has provided us insights into the centrality of care-giving in creating a felt-secure feeling and establishing a safe haven and secure base for students, and this will facilitate them to explore knowledge and to which they may return to for support and guidance when in need. Nonetheless, the extant literature on adult attachment falls short of explaining what kinds of caring teacher-student relationships and care-giving behaviour are expected and will contribute to building up a feeling of felt security and hence a safe haven and secure base in the pedagogical context. Moreover, it does not address the dialectical and complementary effects of relational dynamics as

generated by care-giving in an attached teacher-student relationship on mediating a caring and supportive social context to facilitate students' learning. Considering these limitations, this thesis suggests to bring forward Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning to the discussions on adult attachment in the pedagogical context to explore the synergistic effects of relational dynamics on students' learning and development through the central thread of academics' care.

Vygotskian approach has provided us insights into the effects of interpersonal relationships on intrapersonal learning by means of the integration of care and ethics (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999). Academics' care facilitates teacher-student interactions, sustains caring relationships between them, and mediates a caring and supportive social context conducive to students' learning. Teachers' caring work in facilitating interpersonal dynamics of affective aspect of learning, and in effect promoting intrapersonal cognitive development and closing the ZPD cannot be overestimated (*ibid.*). However, Vygotskian perspective falls short of addressing learning beyond the classroom context, which is important to university students. Adult attachment theory fills this gap. The central tenets of attachment theory in educational context address the interpersonal dynamics between three interrelated aspects: attachment, academic empowerment and care-giving (Feeney, 2004). This view forms the crucial arguments in our thesis for corroborating the significant role of academics' care in facilitating university students' exploration of knowledge. This research proposes that teachers' care-giving generates the relational dynamics conducive to students' felt-secure feelings, and in effect establishing a safe haven and secure base for facilitating their knowledge exploration. Thus, this thesis suggests that academics' care plays a central role in cultivating caring and affective teacher-student relationships to engage students in learning, fostering relational knowing and creating a caring and supportive ethos for learning. This will in turn contribute to attachment bonding, which serves as a safe haven and secure base for students to thrive in exploration and development. The role of academic's care as a central thread in interconnecting these aspects should not be overlooked.

However, the current discussions on teacher care, Vygotskian approach and adult attachment occupy different conceptual planes. This has resulted in failing to fully look into the synergistic effects of relational dynamics created in the affective aspect of learning on the intrapersonal dynamics generated in the psycho-emotional state as expressed in seeking safe haven and secure base in facilitating students' learning and development through the academics' caring work under the particular socio-cultural context. There is a dearth of research examining the central role of care in dialectically interconnecting the affective aspects of learning and adult attachment. The extant literature on teacher care is under-theorized. And, most of the studies are conducted in the Western societies, which fail to address the distinctiveness of different cultural contexts. In view of the growing number of internationally mobile students in the higher education context in which Chinese students constitute a significant segment (UNESCO, 2016), the limitations of previous literature in addressing these conceptual frameworks as a whole or looking into the Chinese context presenting important research gaps.

As a result, this thesis proposes a synthesized theory integrating ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory for exploring the pedagogical implications of academics' care. This research suggests that academics' care plays a central role in creating the relational dynamics, fostering the affective aspect of learning, cultivating the feelings of felt security and hence establishing the safe haven and secure base for students to explore knowledge. In other words, care plays a central part in dialectically interconnecting the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of learning under the influences of particular socio-cultural context. This study then examines the conceptions, experiences and roles of academics' care, and the constructs and negotiation of its meanings and boundaries between students and academics. This research synthesizes the socio-cultural and psycho-social perspectives in exploring academics' care and its relational dynamics on students' learning. Thus, this thesis aims to explore the synthesis of Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning with adult attachment

through the central roles of ethics of care, and to uncover the pedagogical implications for students' holistic development and well-being in Chinese society.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1. An Overview of Research Design**

The purpose of this research was to examine Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its implications for pedagogy in Hong Kong. The research had three main objectives as follows.

- 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students;
- 2) To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong;
- 3) To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong.

This thesis explored the following six research questions.

- 1) How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?
- 2) How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?
- 3) What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?

- 4) What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?
- 5) What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?
- 6) What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?

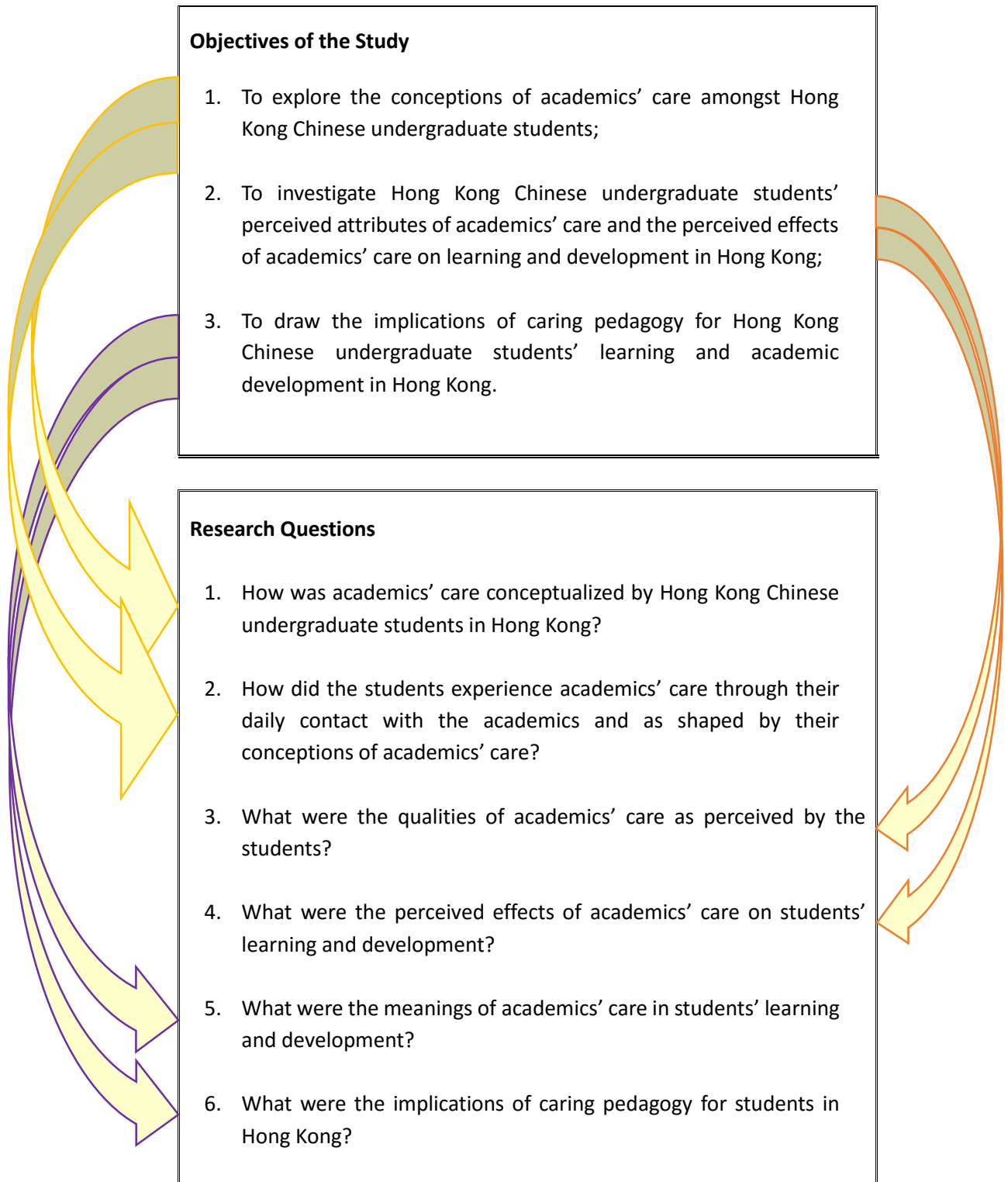
Figure 2 on the next page presents the "Representation of How the Research Questions Address the Study's Objectives". Please also refer to Appendix 1 for "Representation of the Whole Study" frameworks. The research design is addressed in the following section.

### **3.1.1. Research Design in Practice**

Academics' care is an under-researched and under-theorized area in educational studies (Walker and Gleaves, 2016). The majority of the studies on teacher care have been conducted in pre-school and school settings rather than in higher education sector (Lee and Ravizza, 2008; Mariskind, 2014; Walker and Gleaves, 2016), and few have featured the Chinese context. There has been a dearth of literature discussing academics' care in the university context in Hong Kong. Studies of culturally-responsive caring and teaching have shown that cultures do matter in determining and developing appropriate pedagogies for providing students with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to succeed academically and in societies (Garza, 2009; Ladson-Billing, 2009). This gap in the literature is what drives this research on academics' care in the Hong Kong university setting, to examine the local students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care as informed by their daily interactions with faculty members, and the pedagogical implications of such care.



**Figure 2. Representation of How the Research Questions Address the Study's Objectives**



A constructivist paradigm was adopted in this research to acknowledge and explore the multiple realities of the phenomenon, as constructed by social actors (Jennings, 2010; Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). This choice was based on caring being personal, subjective and full of feelings (Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996). Care is personally felt and experienced when the one-caring and the cared-for interact (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009). As such, students construct multiple realities of academics' care generated by their own conceptions and experiences. This has been shown in Garza's (2009) study, in which Latino and Caucasian high school students' perceptions of teachers' behaviour when conveying care differ. Discrepancies between the ways in which teachers and students perceive caring dispositions and actions have also been found (ibid.). As such, a constructivist paradigm was used to frame this research, to recognize that academics' care is a construct of multiple realities generated by students' perspectives and personal contact with teachers. This emic approach allowed to identify the multiple realities by considering and equally valuing students' (insiders') views (Jennings, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011). It examined the students' perspectives and experiences to better understand academics' care and its importance and meanings, as determined by the students. Each student's voice was heard, and his/her personal experience was valued. Thus, given the intangibility and attitudinal characteristics of care, the experiential nature of caring encounters (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009) and the lack of literature on academics' care in the Hong Kong university setting, qualitative research and a thematic analysis under the constructivist paradigm were used in this exploratory study to investigate local undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care.

Framed by the constructivist paradigm, I used a qualitative research in this thesis (Jennings, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011) that included inductive and idiographic approaches (Jennings, 2010; Bernard, 2011). Each informant was asked to write an account of academics' care, and participate in an in-depth interview designed to explore individual perceptions of social realities grounded in the real world (Jennings, 2010; Bernard, 2011;

Hennink et al., 2011). The goal was to examine an ill-informed phenomenon in the natural setting by inductively obtaining meanings from social actors' perspectives (Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008; Jennings, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011). It also improved my understanding of how the students' perceptions and experiences had been shaped by the specific socio-cultural context (Hennink et al., 2011). This, in turn, provided insights into the multifaceted realities, conflicting views, self-constructed interpretations and underlying meanings included in the lived experiences, based on social actors' viewpoints towards the phenomenon studied (Kuper et al., 2008; Jennings, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011). Considering that the conceptions of care and caring behaviour were subject to the individual students' perspectives and encounters, both of which held great personal significance, the qualitative approach allowed me to probe their views and experiences and the meanings bestowed. This thesis did not verify hypothesis or make generalization about the relationship between academics' care and learning outcomes. Hong Kong undergraduate students' self-disclosed accounts of their conceptions and experiences of academics' care through daily encounters formed the empirical data that informed this study, with the purpose of determining the pedagogical implications of academics' care.

Given the subjective nature of the data provided by the students, a thematic analysis was used in this research because it was considered the most appropriate given the empirical data, informed by the students' narrative accounts of lived experiences and the relevant textual materials. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). It was most useful in examining the rich and detailed accounts that composed the empirical data and the complexities of meanings within the textual data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). I used themes in this thesis to depict the students' cultural beliefs and values, and how their attitudes and perspectives shaped their conceptions and experiences, and the related meanings

(Luborsky, 1994). Through the thematic analysis, the empirical data and relevant materials were read, re-read and searched for manifest and latent meanings to identify and analyze the overarching themes and sub-themes that were important to the students (Luborsky, 1994; Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman, 1997; Guest et al., 2012). Counting the frequency of explicit words or phrases was not the most important consideration in identifying themes (ibid.). Instead, it was the students' values, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts embedded in the narrative accounts that were vital in discerning themes (Luborsky, 1994; Daly et al., 1997). Using a thematic analysis to examine the students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care, and the meanings and significance bestowed, exemplifies the essence of the constructivist paradigm. The goals were to appreciate the self-constructed realities of the students and listen to their voices as a way of revealing the related meanings from an emic perspective (Luborsky, 1994; Daly et al., 1997; Boyatzis, 1998; Jennings, 2010; Hennink et al., 2011).

### **3.2. The Researcher's Role and Beliefs**

As a practising university instructor, I hold a particular view of academics' care, and acknowledge that my stance has been shaped by my past experiences. I have met caring professors during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and without their care, I would not have achieved my studies or developed my confidence. Since then, I have come to hold the belief that academics' care improves students' learning, holistic development and well-being. This belief has influenced my expectations regarding academics' roles and care. It has also stoked my research interest in academics' care, and become the force driving this thesis. Learning more about academics' care from students' perspectives will make it easier to integrate into a pedagogy that effectively disseminates knowledge to students, facilitates their learning, supports their holistic growth and enhances their well-being.

I was conscious of the pitfalls associated with qualitative research, one of which was the unintentional projection of the phenomenon onto the informants based on the researcher's values, beliefs and background (Boyatzis, 1998; Mercer, 2007). Knowing that my belief in the importance of academics' care might lead to a subjective view of care that could generate bias, I constantly reminded myself that the students might hold alternative views of academics' care, and might think that it was not important to their academic experience. Thus, I considered both arguments for and against academics' care, and tried my best to remain as neutral as possible throughout the research process.

I also reflected on my position as an insider or outsider, as it might influence the overall research process. For this thesis, I did not see myself as an absolute insider or outsider. As a researcher, I am an insider-researcher, due to my official capacity as a university instructor in Hong Kong, and because I care about my students. Having taught in Hong Kong university since 2007 enabled me to blend into the original research setting and fully immerse myself in the social context with minimum disturbances. Like anthropological studies, this prolonged engagement with the field site gave me a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of teacher care located in Hong Kong university context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shab, 2006; Mercer, 2007; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). This allowed me to discern any nuances of differences in the informants' views and notice any distortions that might influence the data, and as such gain insights into the complexity and subtlety of academics' care in the university context and conduct a deeper analysis from an emic perspective (*ibid.*).

In addition, my prolonged engagement with Crystal University allowed me to ensure that this university was qualified as the field site. In view that care is personally felt and experienced when the one-caring and the cared-for interact (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009), selecting an appropriate field site could be problematic. Despite that I believe caring academics are present in every university and teacher care is all-pervasive, I had to make sure and select a field site that the academics

are practising care and integrating into their everyday teaching and teacher-student contact, as well as the students have experienced academics' care in the field site. Considering this, my immersion in the contextual environment through my official capacity as an instructor has enabled me to confirm in a confident way that teacher care is practised at Crystal University. This affirmation was based on my personal engagement with teaching and interacting with the students, as well as my in-depth and prolonged observations of the Dean's and academic colleagues' interactions with the students and of the Dean's lead in and support of creating a caring ethos. As such, teacher care is practised through a concerted effort of all the academics from the Dean to the junior academic staff in establishing the relational dynamics of care, weaving the social fabrics of care and creating an overall ethos of care. This formed the foremost criterion for selecting Crystal University as the field site in this research.

Moreover, the insider role streamlined my entry to the field site, liaison with gatekeepers and access to students who could participate in this research. My prolonged engagement has familiarized myself with the procedures for research ethics application, and hence eliminated any unnecessary hurdles in going through the application procedures when one was not familiar with the system. I have also established congenial work relationships with my colleagues who were the gatekeepers and taught the target informants, the final-year students. The positive work relations removed the usual obstacles encountered when approaching and persuading the gatekeepers to allow the researcher to reach the informants. My colleagues who were academics well understood the challenges faced in research, and as such showed support for my study and eased my access to the candidate informants. These exemplified some of the merits of insider-research.

Apart from that, prolonged engagement contributes to building the informants' trust (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Establishing trust is crucial in qualitative research to facilitate the interviewees to share their candid thoughts and personal sentiments, and hence reveal their true voices. Considering the intangibility and attitudinal characteristics of

care and the experiential nature of caring encounters (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009), developing trust was of utmost importance in this research into teacher care so as to facilitate the students' sharing of personal experiences, deep feelings and genuine perceptions. I had taught the informants, and developed good and trusting relationships with them through in- and after-class consultations and interactions. I was confident to say that trust has been established with them. As a result, they felt at ease during the interviews, and were willing to share their rich, candid, self-disclosed accounts shed light on the phenomenon studied herein (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shab, 2006; Mercer, 2007). Their generous and genuine sharing allowed me to notice the distinctive features and nuances of differences embedded in their experiences, discern the latent and manifest meanings, detect any misrepresented data, and gain deeper insights into the crux of the phenomenon. These data might not be obtained from an outsider-researcher who was just present in the field site for a few times for conducting interviews only. This also contributed to establishing the trustworthiness of the findings, which is discussed in the section of "Data Quality Procedures".

Insider-research, however, has distinct limitations. Insider-researchers may have prejudiced perspective and hold a myopic view of the phenomenon and the context. They can be blinded by prior relationships and familiarity, such that they take things for granted and thus fail to investigate the everyday happenings, examine the covert facts, explore the informants' thoughts and sentiments, or discern the subtlety of the phenomenon or the context. This can result in insider-researchers failing to ask obvious questions or pursue sensitive topics (Seidman, 1998; Mercer, 2007; Garton and Copland, 2010). It may lead to a superficial analysis, or inflating the importance of the phenomenon.

I also acknowledged that I sometimes assumed the insider role unilaterally. I recalled the problems inherent in unilaterally assuming a researcher-researched identification. Informants might regard researchers as outsiders despite sharing similar backgrounds (Palmer, 2006). From the informants' perspectives, it was still difficult for me to claim

true insiderness. I might have been perceived as an outsider by the informants because I did not belong to their inner circle of friends and classmates. I also did not grow up in the same generation as the informants, and hence did not share the same lived experiences. These generational and socialization differences might have influenced the informants' conceptions of academics' care and caring practices informed by their daily interactions with teachers. This might lead insider-researchers to overlook the generational and socio-cultural differences, which would affect the interpretation of data and the analysis of findings. Thus, I reminded myself not to make any assumptions. I strove to listen openly to the informants' subtle opinions and be sensitive to their sentiments.

Moreover, acquaintance interviews may only glean partial information (Seidman, 1998; Mercer, 2007; Garton and Copland, 2010) due to the informants' feeling embarrassed about engaging in genuine sharing, especially when power relations are involved (Mercer, 2007). My official capacity as an instructor might have created a sense of uneasiness among the informants, due to the inherited asymmetrical power relations between the researcher and the researched. The power-laden relations embedded in social hierarchies and knowledge generation undermine any identification between them (Nairn, Munro and Smith, 2005; Palmer, 2006) and influence the informants' responses, such that they may provide replies intended to fulfil the researcher's own assumptions rather than giving truthful accounts (Mercer, 2007). This type of situation may be further magnified in Chinese society, where power inequality is prevalent (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Being aware of these limitations, I challenged the informants' affirmative views of the importance of teacher care. I asked them questions that supported and opposed academics' care to ensure that the responses were candid. As such, I deliberately asked them a contrasting question to make them choose between a teacher with excellent teaching skills but not caring at all, and a caring teacher with mediocre teaching skills, in order to tap into their deep thoughts about academics' care. As for the inherited power inequality, it was mitigated by my good relationships with the informants, who



appreciated the research as an opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to a caring pedagogy. Thus, candid and sincere answers were obtained from them. Any unclear answers from them were clarified to maintain vigilance at every step of the research process. Overall, my outsidership helped me avoid a myopic analysis of the empirical data, so that an etic and objective perspective could be maintained.

My awareness of the mentioned merits and limitations allowed me to utilize the strengths of being an “institutional” insider and a “hierarchical”, “generational” and “social” outsider. As this research topic was not related to any sensitive issues such as assessment or school policy, conflicts of interest with the informants were minimized. This has also mitigated the situation that students might withhold their views.

### **3.3. An Overview of Qualitative Inquiry**

The qualitative research aimed to generate, in-depth information about the phenomenon studied (Hennink et al., 2011). This was achieved by “mining” each informant deeply for their opinions on and lived experiences related to the research topic to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and the meanings bestowed under a particular socio-cultural context (ibid.). As such, a moderate number of informants, each with in-depth insider knowledge, were required (ibid.). Textual information from the in-depth interviews and written accounts formed the primary focus and served as the main data source for the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011). The qualitative data analysis was interpretive, and as such I sought to interpret the meanings and significance that the informants attached to their perceptions and lived experiences (Hennink et al., 2011). The research setting, sampling methods, selection process, informed consent, assurance of confidentiality and gaining access and entry are discussed in the below sections.

### **3.3.1. Setting of the Research**

This research had three main objectives: 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students; 2) to investigate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong; and 3) to draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong. There are 20 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong, in which eight of which are publically funded through the University Grants Committee (UGC) (Education Bureau, 2016a). My home university, which is one of the government-funded institutes in Hong Kong, was selected as the research setting.

In addition to its status as a well-established institute with a long history in Hong Kong, the primary reason for selecting my home university was my familiarity with the research setting and students. Considering that the students' perceptions and experiences of academics' care were subjective, conditional on their personal encounters, it was necessary to make sure that academics' care was pervasive in their daily interactions throughout the research setting. Having taught at that institute since 2007, I was confident that the Dean of School and faculty members promoted a learner-centred, student-oriented academic environment in which students' voices were heard and valued. This ensured that care was practised by teachers and experienced by students in the everyday interactions. This was not to imply that academics' care was not practised in other institutes. It was to address the trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative research. As in anthropological studies, prolonged immersion in the research setting provided me a more comprehensive understanding of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and unfettered access to potential informants. It also contributed to my ability to establish a rapport, build trust and strike a chord with the informants when conducting the in-depth interviews, which produced rich accounts with unmediated perspectives for analysis (*ibid.*). I had also collaborated with other researchers at this university, and those

partnerships further enhanced my familiarity with the research setting, resulting in more in-depth knowledge of the setting. The university context from which the informants were recruited is briefly described in the next section.

### **3.3.2. The University in this Study**

The university studied in this thesis is hereby given the pseudonym, “*Crystal University*”. It is one of 20 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2016a), globally recognized for research and scholarship. It also stresses applied research and professional education, with academic programmes that emphasize both theories and practical applications in response to the needs of society and in preparing students for their future careers. As such, work-integrated education (work placement) is one of the key features of undergraduate programmes. Crystal University has six faculties, two schools and around 1,200 full-time academic staff members (as of June 2015). In the academic year of 2014/2015, there were almost 32,000 students enrolled in the programmes from sub-degrees to doctoral degrees. The university’s concerns about students’ holistic development is reflected in the formal courses and development programmes designed to cater to students’ academic and non-academic needs. The process followed in recruiting and selecting the informants is discussed in the next section.

### **3.3.3. Process of Recruiting and Selecting Informants**

In this thesis, I used Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students as the lens through which to explore how university students conceptualized and experienced academics’ care in their daily interactions with teachers. Thus, the informants had to be well versed in the social phenomenon (academics’ care), highly articulate and willing to share their thoughts (Bernard, 2011; Babbie, 2016). Purposive sampling was then adopted as the principal

sampling method, along with snowball sampling to address the practical issues explained later in this section.

Finding informants who had experienced academics' care was crucial to the success of this research, thus purposive sampling was the most appropriate method, as it focused on selecting information-rich subjects to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied (Patton, 2002). I then selected the informants based on their prior knowledge of and experiences with academics' care, particularly those who knew a great deal about and had insights into the related issues (Patton, 2002; Jennings, 2010). This collection of deep insights from the informants supported the subsequent in-depth data analysis (Patton, 2002). Thus, students who had experienced academics' care were selected to share their perceptions on its meaning in the university context in Hong Kong.

It was important to establish pre-determined criteria for selecting informants to ensure high-quality responses (Patton, 2002). The two criteria were clearly stated in the "Letter of Invitation" (details provided in Appendix 2), which specified the need for *"Students who are Hong Kong Chinese, as well as who have experiences of academics' care during your study in Crystal University"*. This was to notify students of the cardinal requirements for the research. The first criterion was that the informants had to be final-year, Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates, and they had self-identified, lived experiences of academics' care. In theory, all Hong Kong Chinese students who had lived experiences of academics' care in the research setting formed the potential pool of informants. The final-year cohort was chosen with the assumption that they would have experienced a wider spectrum of teaching practices and thus might have more insights to offer. Given that academics' care is measured by subjective experiences reliant on individual contact with teachers (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Garza, 2009), students' self-identified experiences of the phenomenon were required. I looked for students who had experienced academics' care through daily interactions, including formal classroom contact during lectures or tutorials and informal after-class contact such as consultations.

Considering the subjective nature of the students' perceptions of receiving care, their experiences were a vital indication of teachers' specific behaviour in providing care.

The second criterion was that students had experiences of academics' care during their study at Crystal University. It was reiterated during the briefing session. The potential candidates were first asked directly whether they had experienced academics' care during their time at Crystal University, and then in the final screening they were required to write up an account of one exemplary case of such care. Using students' self-identified, lived experiences of academics' care provided insights into their perceptions regarding its attributes and meanings. The aim of this research was not to establish the extent of caring of all students, and thus the inquiry's aim was to investigate those students who had been consciously the recipients of, and participants in, academics' caring.

I began recruiting informants in January 2014. The "Letter of Invitation" was emailed to final-year undergraduate students at Crystal University on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2014 to solicit their participation in the research. The aims of the research, the details of the students' expected engagement, the criteria for eligibility and other relevant information were included in the "Letter of Invitation", which was designed as a combination of "Information Sheet" and "Solicitation Letter". A 15-minute briefing session was conducted on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2014 during a lecture conducted in a compulsory subject attended by the target final-year students. The briefing session reviewed the research objectives, research process and informants' expected engagement, with the purpose of personally soliciting the students' participation. Then the written and verbal solicitations for research participation were conducted.

Following this initial effort, only a couple of students contacted me about participating in the research. Given this low response rate, the "Letter of Invitation" was re-sent twice, but to little effect. As such, snowball sampling was adopted to complement the purposive sampling. During the snowball sampling, students were asked to suggest additional

candidates who might be willing to participate in the research (Babbie, 2016). This sampling technique is useful in case where informants are difficult to locate (Bernard, 2011; Babbie, 2016). In this case, I had difficulty locating informants due to the personal, subjective nature of the perceptions and experiences being studied. Subsequently, the students who had signed up for the study were asked to refer their classmates who met the mentioned criteria. I then approached and solicited the referees to participate in the research. Given the time required by the referral process during the snowball sampling, the recruitment phase lasted from January to March 2014. The two sampling methods ultimately proved successful, with 12 students agreeing to participate in the research. One student withdrew after attending a one-to-one briefing session on the detailed research process, so a total of 11 students confirmed their decisions to participate in the research. These 11 students formed the sample that provided the empirical data for the analysis in this thesis.

#### **3.3.4. Informed Consent and Permissions**

Obtaining the informants' informed consent was crucial to achieving ethical conduct (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). According to Rossman and Rallis (2012, p.73-74), informed consent was founded on the following ethical principles.

- 1) Participants are as fully informed as possible about the study's purpose and audience;
- 2) They understand what their agreement to participate entails;
- 3) They give that consent willingly; and
- 4) They understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice

The consent form was developed in accordance with Rossman and Rallies' (2012) principles to ensure that the informants were not deceived about the research, and that their participation was voluntary. In addition, the research ethics guidelines and procedures stipulated by the ethics committees of both Durham University (my doctoral university) and Crystal University (my workplace and the research setting) were followed. Ethical approval was granted by both of the mentioned universities in 2014, following the ethics committees' reviews. Given that all of the informants were university students and well-versed in English, the consent form was written in English, which is also the commonly-used language in the higher education sector. Verbal explanations of the research were conducted in Cantonese, the local dialect, to comply with the ethics procedures mandated by the universities.

Once the informants had agreed to participate in the study, appointments were made with each of them to conduct a 30-minute, face-to-face briefing session on the research, in line with the research ethics procedures for obtaining informed consent. During these sessions, I provided detailed verbal explanations of the research in Cantonese, including the research purposes and process, the assurance of confidentiality, the informants' expected responsibilities and engagement, and their rights. To avoid any conflicts of interest, the informants were clearly informed that their decision to participate or not and all of their responses and opinions collected would have absolutely **NO** effect on their current study. They were also reminded of their right to withdraw at any point during the research. Then, they were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and clarify any relevant matters. This was to make sure that they clearly understood the research and their responsibilities to avoid any misunderstandings that might threaten the validity of the empirical data collected, or violate the informed consent. Once all of their queries about the research had been answered and their verbal consent had been obtained, the informants were asked to sign the written "Consent Form" (for details, please refer to Appendix 3). As mentioned, one student withdrew after attending the

briefing session and signing the consent form. A total of 11 students confirmed their decisions to participate in the research with informed consent.

### **3.3.5. Assurance of Confidentiality**

Informed consent served to protect the informants' identities and privacy (Rossman and Rallies, 2012), and efforts were made to protect the confidentiality of the data. The informants were assured that their real names and identifying information would not be used in any discussions or written documents (*ibid.*). Each of the 11 informants was given a pseudonym that was used throughout the research. Any names that could identify the informants or the university studied were concealed. In addition, all of the interview data, recordings, transcripts, write-up accounts, notes and any relevant materials (both electronic and written) were stored securely in my office. These measures assured compliance with ethical standards in guaranteeing the informants confidentiality.

### **3.3.6. Gaining Access and Entry**

My official capacity as an instructor at Crystal University eased access and entry to the research setting. The university's gatekeepers, including the research ethics committee member in-charge of reviewing and approving the research ethics application and the faculty members who taught the final-year students, supported the research. Careful preparation was still needed to establish access to the students. This included preparing well-thought-out research ethics procedures that complied with the research ethics committee's standards submitted for review, and establishing a rapport with the faculty members teaching the students. I had no difficulties in these areas. The research ethics procedures were developed in accordance with Rossman and Rallies' (2012) principles, and the research ethical standards of Durham University and Crystal University. The



congenial work relationships I had established with the faculty members also facilitated my access to the students.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedures**

Three data collection methods were used in this research: 1) in-depth interviews with the informants; 2) the informants' self-constructed write-ups of one exemplary case of experiencing academic's care during their university study; and 3) researcher's notes. The empirical data collected from the in-depth interviews served as the main source of data. The write-ups were completed before the in-depth interviews were conducted, and thus the former provided preliminary insights into how the informants conceptualized and were informed of academics' care, and its attributes. These initial ideas were then used to fine-tune the in-depth interviews in response to each informant's experiences of academics' care. The researcher's notes were based on the contemplation of my conversations and interactions with the informants, and self-reflection during the research process, all of which helped me navigate the nuances and subtlety of the informants' accounts and opinions. They also ensured that I remained vigilant against prejudice. Secondary data relevant to the study, namely literature, were gleaned to broaden the scope of the research, facilitate the analysis and substantiate the arguments. These data were also collected from January to March 2014.

The three data collection methods and procedures are described and justified in the following sections. Appendix 4 shows the alignment of the research questions with the data collection methods.

### 3.4.1. Students' Write-up Accounts

The informants' write-up accounts of academics' care served several purposes in the research design. They provided preliminary insights into how the informants conceptualized and experienced academics' care and its attributes, which helped me customize the in-depth interview questions. The accounts also allowed me to pursue interesting, important and unexpected remarks, clarify unclear material and explore additional insights into academics' care. These empirical data not only contributed to the data analysis in the later stage, but also played a part in the triangulation for establishing trustworthiness of the research. In view that I had taught the informants, positive teacher-student relationships had already been established. I then fostered my rapport and engagement with the informants by commencing the data collection process and giving them time to write their accounts. Making the informants central to the research process through writing up their self-disclosed accounts fostered the positive researcher-researched relationships conducive to collecting data through the in-depth interviews. Composing the accounts instilled confidence in the informants, which put them at ease during the in-depth interviews and allowed them to bond with the research experience (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This contributed to engaging the informants in the research, and well preparing them psychologically for the in-depth interviews followed. The write-up accounts also authenticated the informants' suitability with a detailed and factual depiction of an exemplary case of academics' care.

Once the consent forms had been signed, the informants were asked to write up one exemplary case of academic's care experienced during their time in the research setting (for the write-up form and instructions, please refer to Appendix 5). The informants were asked to clearly describe the qualities of the academics' care that had impressed them most. To put the informants at ease when writing the genuine accounts, they were reminded that their names and identities would remain confidential, that was **NO** need to disclose the faculty members' names and that the opinions shared in the research

would have absolutely **NO** effect on their current studies. This reiteration of the privacy protocols was intended to encourage genuine, candid write-up accounts. Each informant was given two weeks to complete the write-up account, and all of the informants finished within the period from January to March 2014. The in-depth interviews were scheduled once the write-up accounts had been completed.

### **3.4.2. In-depth Interviews with Students**

In-depth interviews were used as the main data collection method in this research because they allowed me to generate rich narrative accounts of the phenomenon that were informed by the informants' perspectives and lived experiences. This enhanced my understanding of their thought processes and how they made sense of their experiences, which illuminated the situational context and provided detailed insights into the phenomenon from an emic perspective (Seidman, 1998; Patton, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). As Vygotsky (1986, p.256) explained, "thought and speech turn out to be the key to the nature of human consciousness ..... a word is a microcosm of human consciousness". The narrative nature of in-depth interviews addressed my interest in understanding each individual's lived experiences and the meanings bestowed in their own words (Seidman, 1998). It also allowed me to show my appreciation for each informant's decision to express their thoughts and feelings (ibid.).

Specially, open-ended, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used in this research. Rather than going through the questions rigidly, the conversation-like stimulus-prompts and dynamic social exchanges that characterized in-depth interviews allowed me to react to each informant's personality, appearance and demeanour while responding to their unique responses and following up with further probing questions (Hennink et al., 2011). I also pondered on and analyzed the informants' narrative accounts as best as I could on the spot in order to ask them to explain their views explicitly and in detail, which revealed

the meanings behind social contexts (Seidman, 1998; Jennings, 2005). The interviews allowed me to pursue interesting, important and unexpected comments, verify ambiguous remarks, reveal hidden thoughts and identify salient details (ibid.). Thus, in-depth interviews were used as the principal data collection method in this research.

An interview guide was developed, and the questions were designed to explore the informants' conceptions and lived experiences of academics' care, determine its perceived attributes, meanings and perceived effects on learning and development and elicit the pedagogical implications from their perspectives (for the details of the "Connection between the Research Questions and the Interview Questions" and "Interview Guide", please refer to Appendices 6 and 7 respectively).

The in-depth interviews began with an opening question about the informants' perceptions of academics' care to set the tone and prepare them for the subsequent questions. To address the three main research objectives, the following questions served as the foci for the interview.

- 1) What are the meanings of academics' care to you in your learning in the university context?
- 2) How do you conceptualize academics' care in the university context?
- 3) How are you informed of care through your daily experiences with academics?
- 4) How do you see the roles played by academics' care during your study in the university context?
- 5) How do you see the implications of practising caring pedagogy for students in the university context?

One of my roles as the interviewer was to elicit rich information from the informants. The fluid nature and stimuli-response characteristics of the conversation-like interviews with pre-set and probing questions gave me latitude to follow the informants' responses and facilitate interactions (Hennink et al., 2011). This provided access to the interesting, important and unexpected aspects of the research, which provided unique insights into the phenomenon from an emic perspective (Jennings, 2010). Hence, the interview guide was used as an aide-memoire to ensure that I asked all the necessary questions to address the main research purposes and probing informants' answers. I followed the informants' train of thought with minimum interference while simultaneously keeping the interview focused on the research objectives. According to Patton (2002, p.341), "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer", I then strove to elicit the pertinent information without having any subjective effect on their views. During the interview process, I reminded myself to limit my own sharing and thoughts about academics' care. I was careful when phrasing the questions, striking a balance between giving sufficient background information about the research and withholding my stance on academics' care. I tried my best to remain neutral, and pursued both positive and negative perceptions of academics' care. I also learned to tolerate silence, and gave the informants the time and space they needed to respond (Seidman, 1998). This reflective thinking guided me through the interview process.

During the in-depth interviews, the informants' unexpected remarks were discerned when I contrasted their replies with my views of academics' care as informed by my own experiences. The students' expressions were also contrasted with the literature on teacher care, which had been thoroughly reviewed when writing the "Literature Review" section and before the interviews. When it was found their remarks were noticeably different from the literature on care or my views, follow-up questions were asked about their replies to gain more in-depth understanding of their views. This was to find out why they held the distinctive perspectives and explore in detail how their views were different

from the literature. These clarification processes in the in-depth interviews enabled us to gain insights into the students' views, and as such facilitated writing the discussions and conducting the conceptual analysis because of the rich data collected.

In-depth interviews with the informants were scheduled once I had received and reviewed the write-up accounts. Eleven interviews were conducted during the period from February to March 2014, and each lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Cantonese, the mother tongue of Hong Kong Chinese, was used in the interview to make the informants feel at ease and to solicit unmediated responses. The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded using digital recorders for verbatim transcription and documentation. These recordings were transcribed as quickly as possible following each interview. Verbatim transcription in Chinese was used to maintain the integrity of the informants' unmediated, self-disclosed accounts and ensure research rigour (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Transcribing each in-depth interview allowed me to familiarize myself with the empirical data at this stage (*ibid.*). The transcripts were sent to each of the informants immediately to confirm and clarify the data. These measures ensured correct transcription and minimal interpretation issues. I translated direct quotes from the informants into English while writing the research report. I kept notes throughout the data collection process to reflect on any distinctive or nuanced material worth exploring in the data analysis phase.

### **3.4.3. Researcher's Notes**

I used field notes to systematically record my perceptions, thoughts and insights (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). The notes had two main components: detailed observations and my reflections. The descriptive data captured the conversations, interactions and incidents that occurred during the interviews, while my reflections included preliminary insights, emerging hypotheses and any distinctive, nuanced remarks about the research

(ibid.). Reviewing my notes helped me write effectively the phenomenon, which facilitated the subsequent data analysis and identification of themes.

Writing researcher's notes has contributed to establishing transferability. After each of the in-depth interviews, I conducted a preliminary review of the interview content and made my notes. Any changes in tone or sentiment, and salient or unexpected remarks were logged to obtain preliminary ideas about the informants' conceptions and lived experiences of academics' care, and its perceived attributes and effects. After that, when I read the transcripts, coded the transcripts and conducted preliminary analysis, I wrote down any conceptual and analytical reflections and insights come to my mind. By applying the memoing technique, these notes have formed the researcher's notes. As such, when I moved on to the actual analysis and write up of the empirical data, these research notes were often made reference in order to clarify my thoughts and more importantly on sharpening and consolidating my initial identification of themes. Moreover, the process of writing the researcher's notes has enabled me to record and write down key points of conceptual and analytical insights in detail throughout the coding and analysis processes. As such, this has established transferability. Transferability is further discussed in the below section about "Data Quality Procedures".

In this regard, research notes also helped me determine when theoretical saturation had been reached. After reviewing and reflecting on the researchers' notes, I was confident to remark that theoretical saturation has been achieved with the 11 in-depth interviews. Moreover, the researcher's notes documented my train of thought from conception to delivery. They also facilitated my analysis of the data and identification of themes in the data analysis phase and served as means of triangulation to establish trustworthiness.

### **3.5. Data Quality Procedures**

Three main criteria were used to ensure the quality of the empirical data and the trustworthiness of the findings: “Credibility”, “Transferability” and “Dependability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Leininger, 1994). The procedures for meeting these criteria, and my reflexivity are discussed in the following sections.

#### **3.5.1. Credibility**

Credibility refers to “the ‘truth’, value, or ‘believability’ of the findings that have been established by the researcher” (Leininger, 1994, p.105). Three main strategies were used to enhance the credibility of the research process and the findings: prolonged engagement, member checks and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rossman and Rallis, 2012).

Prolonged engagement required that I involved in the research site for a sufficient length of time to gain a comprehensive and deep understanding of it and the phenomenon studied, and notice and consider any distortions that might influence the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). It also contributed to building the informants’ trust (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I have been teaching at Crystal University since 2007, which gave me a comprehensive understanding of the university context and undergraduate students in Hong Kong. I had taught the informants for at least one semester, and developed and maintained positive relationships with them. This created a positive relational context in which to establish a rapport with the informants, build trust, break down their psychological barriers and make them feel at ease when sharing their thoughts. The informants were genuinely willing to share their perceptions and experiences, which allowed me to gain insights into the crux of the phenomenon and discern any misrepresented data.



Member checks were the most crucial technique used to establish credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The processed data and emerging findings were checked with the members from whom the original empirical data were collected to ensure the correct and accurate interpretation of data and findings and elicit further elaboration or information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). The transcripts of the in-depth interview contents were sent to each of the informants immediately following transcription. This allowed them to check and verify the transcripts to ensure that they were an accurate account of the original interview. The informants' comments on the meanings of the content, and any other further information about the research topic were also sought. The remarks and comments received from the informants mainly concerned typos or clarification, and the latter provided additional insights into academics' care. Once the informants had responded to the transcripts, any necessary amendments were made to ensure accurate documentation, representation and interpretation for data analysis and theme identification.

Triangulation was used to construct a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon by comparing and contrasting the data collected and/or analyzed (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). It strengthened my confidence and credibility in drawing conclusions (Patton, 2002). Of the four types of triangulation, methods, sources, investigators and theories (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002), this research used the first two. The triangulation of methods was used to gauge the consistency of the findings generated by different data collection methods; namely the write-up accounts and the interview content. The triangulation of sources was used to reveal the consistency of the different data sources within the same method; that is, comparing what the informants wrote with what they said (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of methods and sources were applied to this research, through collecting the informants' write-up accounts from the period of January to March 2014, and then conducting in-depth interviews with each of them from February to March 2014. The transcript contents from each informant generated from in-depth interviews were

checked for the consistency of what they had written down in their write-up accounts. The temporal difference in data collection from write-up accounts and those from in-depth interviews further contributed to ensuring the consistency of viewpoints and narrative accounts. Verbatim transcription also retained the originality of the informants' original accounts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Since I personally transcribed each of the informants' in-depth interviews, I started to familiarize myself with the empirical data and reflect on the contents at the early stage of data collection (ibid.). This also contributed to gaining a deep understanding of the data from the informants' views, and justifying the credibility of the analysis. These procedures have enhanced the research credibility.

### **3.5.2. Transferability**

Transferability refers to “whether particular findings from a qualitative study can be transferred to another similar context or situation and still preserve the particularized meanings, interpretations, and inferences from the completed study” (Leininger, 1994, p.106). Thick description and purposive sampling were used as strategies for enhancing transferability in this research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.316) maintained that “(the researcher) can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility”. Thus, I provided a detailed discussion of the methodology, findings and rationale for identifying particular themes and drawing conclusions that provided rich information in a framework of thick description (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Purposive sampling was used to assure data quality in transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The informants were selected based on their ability to provide rich and specific details about their conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its meanings (ibid.). This ensured that a wealth of deep information related to the research

questions was generated, which not only enabled me to conduct an in-depth data analysis (Patton, 2002), but also allowed those interested to decide the transferability of the research findings to other settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These two strategies addressed the transferability concerns (ibid.).

### **3.5.3. Dependability**

Dependability refers to “whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.278). Triangulation, thick description and an audit trail were used to establish dependability in this research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). My use of triangulation of methods and sources and thick description are described in the “Credibility” and “Transferability” sections respectively. Data were collected through the informants’ write-up accounts and in-depth interviews. The comparison and contrasting of the data contributed to checking for and ensuring consistency in this study. A detailed discussion of methodological design and data analysis, which provided rich information in a framework of thick description for justifying the whole research process, was also conducted in a consistent and reasonable manner. These two means contributed to establishing dependability.

Regarding the audit trail, meticulously detailed records of the data and the research process were kept (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The following data categories were maintained: 1) Raw data (audio-records of the in-depth interviews, printed and electronic copies of the write-up accounts and interview transcripts, and researcher’s notes); 2) Data reduction and analysis products (electronic copies of codes, coding processes and mind maps); 3) Data reconstruction and synthesis products (electronic copies of preliminary and final themes); 4) Process notes (electronic copies of research design and methodology drafts); 5) Materials relating to intentions and dispositions (electronic copies of research proposal, justification and significance drafts); and 6) Instrument development

information (electronic copies of drafted interview guides and write-up account forms, and documents submitted for ethics reviews) (ibid.). The printed and electronic records were kept safely in my office, and electronic copies were backed up for security purposes.

I cross-checked every procedure, including the development of the interview guide, the codes and the themes. Each chapter of this thesis was thoroughly written and re-written to effectively reflect the rationale, justifications and relevant information, and electronic copies of the drafts were saved. The meticulous procedures aimed to enhance the dependability.

#### **3.5.4. Reflexivity**

Reflexivity as “a process that involves conscious self-reflection on the part of researchers to make explicit their potential influence on the research process” (Hennink et al., 2011, p.19) was used alongside “Credibility”, “Transferability” and “Dependability” to establish the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Hennink et al., 2011). As such, I engaged in reflexivity through constant self-reflective note-takings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio, 2009; Jones et al., 2010; Hennink et al., 2011; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). I constantly reminded myself of my own values, stance and assumption on academics’ care, which had been shaped by my past experiences of care in undergraduate and postgraduate study. Knowing that my perceptions might influence how I set the research topic, selected the informants, collected, analyzed and interpreted the data and wrote up the report (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Hennink et al., 2011; Rossman and Rallis, 2012). I vigilantly considered supporting and disproving arguments about academics’ care in the university context. I was critical about the methodological rationale, design and procedures (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and limited my sharing of thoughts with the informants during the briefing sessions and in-depth interviews. I provided clear, sufficient information about the research topic and purposes, but I did not

talk about my own past experiences of academics' care. I adopted a neutral stance during the interviews, made my phrasing as neutral as possible and probed the informants' opinions from a wide range of perspectives for and against academics' care. In particular, whenever I sensed an informant might have answered an interview question to suit my expectation, I immediately followed up with a question that challenged his/her answer to determine their initial intention. Thus, I deliberately challenged their affirmative views of academics' care. This was to prevent the interviewees from falling into the trap of stereotyping the researcher's thoughts and responding in a way to fit the stereotype. Probing the informants' answers from different viewpoints stimulated their thoughts and encouraged them to candidly express their opinions.

Given the potential effects that the researcher can have on the researched (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hennink et al., 2011; Rossman and Rallis, 2012), the data analysis and report writing were also treated with caution. Considering the tendency of a researcher's interpretation to dominate an interviewee's voice, I was aware that my own pre-conceptions and presumed knowledge might colour how I analyzed the empirical data and interpreted the narrative accounts (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I constantly reminded myself of the generational and socio-cultural differences between myself and the informants, remained objective when coding the data, identifying the themes and analyzing and interpreting the findings. Keeping an open mind on different perspectives and theoretical frameworks, rather than immersing in my own presumption, also facilitated me to engage in reflexivity (Hennink et al., 2011). Bringing forward literature to substantiate the analysis contributed to broadening the views and having the arguments well-grounded. Thus, I tried my best to write up a research report that candidly reflected the informants' voices and views.

I made every effort to engage in self-reflection and critical scrutiny on my thoughts and practices throughout the research (Hennink et al., 2011). I spent ample of time reflecting and cross-checking every process. While writing and re-writing numerous drafts of each

chapter, I reflected on any of my views that might have influenced my thinking and writing processes. These measures aimed to differentiate the informants' genuine, self-disclosed accounts from the researcher's self-constructed views during the entire research process.

### **3.6. Data Management**

Databases of the raw data, which were collected from January to March 2014, were established and maintained for identification and safety purposes. The informants' names and the date and time of their interviews were indicated on the interview transcripts, and their names were noted on the write-up accounts. Two copies of the interview transcripts and write-up accounts, printed and electronic, were kept and managed in separate databases in chronological order. Researchers' notes were also kept chronologically.

After the first coding process, the preliminary codes identified were entered into an Excel sheet to identify themes and maintain a record. The coding process was repeated iteratively, with additional, newly-identified codes added to the previous batches. Excel files with convenient sorting functions helped me identify themes while conducting the data analysis. I used the memoing technique to record my thoughts and insights during the coding process directly on the Excel sheets. Electronic copies of the codes, themes and reflective notes were stored in Excel files and kept chronologically during the first phase of the analysis from July to October 2014. These Excel files, the informants' interview transcripts and write-up accounts and researcher's notes were consulted frequently during the ongoing data analysis (including preliminary data analysis during data collection) and report writing processes from January 2014 to the spring of 2016.

### 3.7. Data Analysis

The data analysis was informed by the following research questions.

- 1) How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?
- 2) How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?
- 3) What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?
- 4) What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?
- 5) What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?
- 6) What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?

There were three primary sources of data in this research: interview data, write-up accounts and researcher's notes. Given that all of the data were in word form, a thematic analysis was the main method used to identify the themes that emerged from the textual materials, because it is the most useful means of examining rich, detailed textual data with complex embedded meanings (Daly et al., 1997; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). Thick description was also used to complement the thematic analysis in order to generate rich depictions and detailed accounts of the students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of teacher care in the university context.

Specifically, a data-driven thematic analysis was applied to this research (Boyatzis, 1998). It involved a process of inductively coding the words and syntax of the data, without being influenced by my pre-conceived ideas or any extant theoretical frameworks (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes I identified were strongly connected to the data to reflect the informants' perspectives and experiences of, and the meanings given to, the phenomenon (Luborsky, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The main criterion for identifying a theme was its ability to encompass key thoughts central to the empirical data by capturing the essence, meanings and significance of the phenomenon in the particular context, rather than a quantifiable measure like counting word frequency (Luborsky, 1994; Daly et al., 1997; Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). The themes were discerned via a thorough and iterative process of reading and re-reading the empirical data included in the interview transcripts, write-up accounts and researcher's notes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The overarching themes and sub-themes were then identified to uncover the manifest and latent meanings constructed by the informants, and thereby better understand the intricacy and subtlety of the phenomenon (Luborsky, 1994; Daly et al., 1997; Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

The main data analysis stage in this research began in July 2014 with the commencement of the coding process, though the preliminary data analysis began before and overlapped with the data collection process. Regarding the primary data source (the results of the in-depth interviews with the 11 informants), although the audio records were personally transcribed immediately, the main phase of data coding and theme identification was conducted from July to October 2014. In view that data analysis and report writing were ongoing processes required continual refinement, they would culminate in the spring of 2016. Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step guidelines for thematic analysis were adapted for this research. The steps that I followed to code the data, identify the themes and conduct



the thematic analysis are described in the following sections to ensure transparency and accountability in the data coding and analysis processes.

### ***Step 1. Familiarizing with the Data***

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis begins with immersing oneself in the empirical data by minutely and repeatedly reading and re-reading the data to the extent that the researcher becomes familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Framed by the research questions, I first carefully read and re-read each of the informants' write-up accounts and obtained initial impression of their perceptions of academics' care and the distinguished qualities giving rise to it. Having formed these preliminary ideas, I read and re-read the informants' transcripts in related to each of their write-up accounts. In the meantime, I read and re-read the researcher's notes to recall the initial thoughts formed immediately after conducting the in-depth interviews and since then. I continuously reflected on the write-up account and interview contents, the university context, the informants' characteristics and why and how they answered the questions in a particular way. This allowed me to immerse myself in the data, familiarize myself with the depth and breadth of the materials and gain some preliminary insights into the informants' conceptions and experiences of academics' care in the selected context. I applied the memoing technique, and wrote down any notes and preliminary ideas formed when reading and re-reading the write-up accounts and transcripts. I referred to these notations as I coded and analyzed the data in the later stages. This iterative process of re-reading all of the relevant materials and memoing ended when I had fully immersed myself in the data and gained preliminary insights into the informants' views. This phase laid the foundation for the rest of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## ***Step 2. Generating Initial Codes***

This step involved generating initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A code is referred to “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Inductive coding was applied, aided by constant comparison. The coding was data-driven and generated with an open-minded approach without being influenced by any pre-conceived ideas or theoretical frameworks (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The criteria of repetition and salience were adopted to examine the data, and organize and categorize them into meaningful codes (Luborsky, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, the frequency of repetition for each of the words or phrases was not the sole consideration. Salience as viewed from the informants’ perspectives contextualized to the whole conversation was taken into serious consideration when highlighting the codes. I thus reminded myself to remain open-minded, code according to the informants’ genuine responses and mull their implied meanings over to avoid coding to fit the research objectives or any pre-conceived ideas or conceptual frameworks.

The generation of initial codes was a two-tier, iterative coding process. I had the informants’ write-up accounts to start with the coding, and after that I followed up the coding process with each of their transcripts. I manually highlighted the recurrent and salient contents (namely words, phrases and narrations) on the printed copies of the informants’ write-up accounts and interview transcripts using highlighters.

To illustrate the two-tier coding process, I started with coding the informants’ write-up accounts. I first highlighted the words and phrases that occurred at least twice in each of the informants’ write-up accounts by applying the rule of repetition. Then, I applied the criterion of salience and pondered on the narrations from the informants’ views. I paid full attention to any interesting or unexpected points that might generate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I looked for any words, phrases or examples that implied hidden

meanings and significance. After that, I cross-referenced these with all the informants' write-up accounts. Constant comparison was used to search for shared elements and detect nuanced differences among different write-up accounts. I highlighted those mentioned by more than one informant with a highlighter of another colour, with the thought that points mentioned by more than one interviewee would prove significant. This has produced the initial pool of candidate codes based on the write-up accounts.

After that, I coded the informants' interview transcripts. I highlighted the words and phrases that occurred at least twice in each of the informants' transcripts by applying the criterion of repetition. Likewise, I then applied the criterion of salience and interrogated the empirical data from the informants' perspectives. I paid meticulous attention to any interesting or unexpected points that might contribute to forming patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I looked for any words, phrases, narrations or examples that had been emphasized by the informants, conveyed their sentiments, reflected their emotions (especially changes in emotions like sudden changes in tone) or revealed hidden meanings and significance. Constant comparison was also applied to search for shared elements and discern nuances of differences and meanings among the informants' transcripts. I repeated the same cross-coding process and highlighted all the words and phrases identified in more than one informant's transcript by using a highlighter of another colour. This was in view that points mentioned by more than one interviewee would prove significant. These preliminary codes were still subject to further examination.

Subsequently, cross-coding of all the informants' write-up accounts and transcripts was carried out. I cross-examined the initial codes identified from each of the informants' transcripts with those codes identified from their respective write-up accounts, and then cross-referenced and checked the codes among different informants' write-up accounts and transcripts. This was to verify that all the initial codes were highlighted in the fulfilment of the repetition and salience criteria. These iterative searching, verification and cross-examination processes aimed to ferret out any hidden patterns and discern the

subtle differences among the write-up accounts and transcripts by applying constant comparison, in order to uncover any shared manifest and latent meanings and implied significance among the interviewees. This was to validate the initial codes as generated by an exhaustive, iterative two-tiered coding process.

The data coding was thus an iterative, two-tier process. I read and re-read the informants' write-up accounts and interview transcripts to code all of the meaningful elements in relation to the research questions, carefully not to overlook any relevant data. It seemed to have generated two independent sets of codes, one from the write-up accounts and the other from the transcripts. However, these apparently separate groups of codes were not totally disconnected from each other. Oftentimes, the initial codes generated from the write-up accounts appeared in the transcripts. This has indicated the alignment and salience of the initial codes. The codes identified from the write-up accounts had formed the preliminary set of codes, and served as the grounds for corroborating the subsequent coding processes of the transcripts and for authenticating the initial codes generated. It has laid a solid foundation for substantiating the themes identified in the later stages; as the codes generated were subject to a two-tier, matrix-like verification and authentication process. The memoing technique was applied to record and reference noteworthy thoughts, insights and candidate themes. These researcher's notes have substantiated the identification of themes in the later stages. The iterative coding process ended when I had generated a list of codes and could not identify any new ones (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This demonstrated that saturation had been reached. As mentioned in the "Data Management" section, these initial codes were entered into Excel sheet to identify themes and record notations, which facilitated the subsequent steps.

### ***Step 3. Searching for Themes***

This step involved re-focusing the analysis at a broader interpretive level by collating and categorizing the codes into potential themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Repetition and salience were adopted as criteria for identifying themes (Luborsky, 1994). The identification process was also aided by constant comparison.

First, I read and re-read all of the codes that had been entered into the Excel sheets to immerse myself in the first level of analysis. I interrogated the codes in relation to the informants' accounts and experiences of academics' care, and the meanings implied. By comparing and contrasting the codes with one another from the informants' perspectives, I considered how different codes might share similar meanings, or have meanings overlapped, or connected in relation to the research topic. I categorized codes that shared similar meanings and related to one another into candidate themes, and distinguished those that stood out. Shared meanings had to be central to the main ideas of the empirical data and demonstrate a conceptual link connecting the data, codes and arguments in addressing the research questions. Then, I assessed the candidate themes in accordance with the informants' views, sentiments, emotions and changes in emotions, and the implied meanings within each of their write-up accounts and interview transcripts. When assessing the candidate themes, I also referred to the researcher's notes to reflect on any salient remarks or analytical thoughts made by the informants. To stimulate my analytical thinking, I drew mind maps to critically review, analyze and gain insights into the hierarchies of codes and candidate themes, and how these categories were related to and interconnected with one another. Please refer to "Appendix 8. Mind Maps" for the conceptual analysis and display of the conceptions, roles, qualities and significance of academics' care. This phase ended once I had identified a collection of candidate themes and cross-checked them with the empirical data. This paved the way for reviewing and distinguishing the overarching themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

#### ***Step 4. Reviewing the Themes***

This step involved refining the candidate themes to identify the overarching themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I critically reviewed the themes to ascertain which were overarching, which were sub-themes that corroborated the distinctive hierarchical patterns of meanings, and which had been mistaken for themes and thus had to be discarded (ibid.). The sub-themes were used to provide structure for a particularly large and complex theme, and to demonstrate the hierarchy of meanings within the data (ibid.). The criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity were applied to identifying the coherence of data and meanings within each theme and against one another (Patton, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Internal homogeneity refers to the extent to which all the collated data within a theme hold together in a coherent and meaningful way (Patton, 2002). External heterogeneity is the extent to which one theme is clearly differentiated and mutually exclusive from the others (ibid.). The codes were hence moved among different themes, and were compared and contrasted to determine internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity with reference to the coherence of meanings and in relation to the research questions (Patton, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data and all of the codes were reviewed once again to avoid overlooking any meaningful data from earlier coding stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Reviewing the themes was a lengthy process. First, I examined the internal consistency and coherence among all of the collated codes within each candidate theme to ascertain whether the data were connected in a meaningful pattern (Patton, 2002), and corroborated the key arguments. I compared and contrasted the codes within each theme to discern nuances in their meanings and assess whether the codes supported the central idea, or distracted from, or undermined the central argument, in addressing the research questions. I moved the “side-tracked” codes from one candidate theme to another to look for and check “better fit” among all the potential themes. After that, each candidate theme was compared and contrasted with one another to make sure that its

meanings were clearly differentiated from the others. In addition, I compared and contrasted the themes to distinguish hierarchical patterns of manifest and latent meanings that differentiated the arguments into different levels of conceptual analysis from the informants' perspectives. The codes were re-arranged until coherence was achieved within each candidate theme. This resulted in salient overarching themes and sub-themes identified to capture the essence, meanings and significance of academics' care from the informants' perspectives. Theoretical saturation was also achieved

This re-arranging process was self-appraising. When I re-read researcher's notes and mind maps during the process of reviewing themes, I kept challenging myself about the preliminary ideas I had formed about candidate themes, and critiqued my own initial conceptual and analytical thoughts about how the informants had perceived and experienced academics' care. The phase ended once I had identified the salient overarching themes and sub-themes, and had developed a good idea of how they fit together (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This paved the way for analyzing the findings in the later stages.

#### ***Step 5. Defining and Naming the Themes***

This step involved defining and writing a detailed and interpretative analysis of the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I had to identify the essence of each overarching theme, ensuring that the sub-themes were encompassed, to present a clear insight into the hierarchy and structure of meanings (ibid.). I provided a serious account of what aspects of the data were captured by each of the overarching themes and sub-themes, and how they fit coherently and consistently into an overall discussion that addressed the research questions and was well-grounded in the empirical data (ibid.).

I then defined and named each of the overarching themes and sub-themes, and wrote a detailed account and interpretative analysis of them. Each of the overarching themes and its accompanying sub-themes are discussed in detail in “Chapter 4 Findings” as part of the framework of thick description. I continuously reminded myself to write up the themes from the informants’ perspectives. To capture the essence and latent meanings of each theme, the vivid examples and extracts mentioned in the interview conversations were identified and selected to corroborate the informants’ arguments, analytic thoughts and opinions about academics’ care (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This phase ended once I had clearly defined the overarching themes and sub-themes with concise names given and detailed scope and content descriptions.

#### ***Step 6. Producing the Report***

This last step involved the final analysis and interpretation of the findings, and the writing of the research report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The purposes were to inform the readers of the complexity of the phenomenon by providing a concise, coherent, logical and interesting account of the empirical data, and to convince them of the validity of the analysis (ibid.). I wrote an interpretative and conceptual discussion of the informants’ subtle and nuanced perspectives and experiences of academics’ care that illustrated the complexity of the phenomenon.

Conceptualizing and constructing the models of academics’ care were subject to an iterative mind-provoking and self-appraising process. I had constructed embryonic conceptual models of academics’ care while analyzing the findings and writing up “Chapter 4 Findings”. I attempted to connect the overarching themes, together with the sub-themes, in a holistic and hierarchical pattern on a conceptual plane, rather than just describing the informants’ narrations. I reminded myself to analyze the themes from the informants’ emic views while keeping the researcher’s etic perspectives in order to



conceptualize and construct the models of academics' care from a theoretical viewpoint while grounding in the empirical data. As a consequence of these critical reflections, what impressed me most was the continuum of academics' care featured by a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity in students' experiences of care. This conceptual framework was also distinct from the extant discussions on teacher care. This model was conceptualized while writing up the first draft of "Chapter 5 Discussion".

After the initial draft of the "Chapter 4 Findings" and "Chapter 5 Discussion", I continuously re-wrote and refined the discussions on the findings. The iterative process of re-writing was subject to self and critical appraisals of the findings from the students' views situated in the socio-cultural context. From these self-appraising processes, a hidden but overarching theme of academics' care was identified to interconnect Vygotsky's affective aspects of learning and adult attachment theory through teachers' pivotal caring work. Moreover, what struck me was the dialectic influences of interpersonal dynamics on the intrapersonal psycho-social state under the distinctive Chinese context, and as such exerting an effect on students' learning and development. As a result of these critical analyses while continuously refining the drafts of "Chapter 4 Findings" and "Chapter 5 Discussion", the conceptual model of academics' care rested on overlapping domains of relational zone, attachment behaviour and socio-cultural context was constructed. This conceptual framework of academics' care was distinguished from the current discussions on teacher care. This thesis has recognized the dialectical interplay of socio-cultural and psycho-social dynamics on students' learning, holistic development and well-being. I kept refining the thesis report until the final submission.

The empirical findings of this research are presented in "Chapter 4 Findings". All of the relevant literature and theoretical concepts were brought forward to substantiate the interpretative analysis of the findings and present a framework that synthesized the data and conceptual ideas. A conceptual analysis of the findings on academics' care and its implications for integrating care into pedagogy are discussed in "Chapter 5 Discussion".

The concluding remarks on students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care and its pedagogical implications in university context are provided in "Chapter 6 Conclusion".

## Chapter 4. Findings

### 4.1. An Overview of the Findings

The findings of this investigation of Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care are reported in this chapter. All of the informants were final-year local undergraduate students who studied management-related disciplines at Crystal University. This chapter presents a synthesized discussion of the findings of this study, drawn from a thematic analysis of the informants' accounts provided in in-depth interviews and write-ups, and researcher's notes. Representative quotes are identified to illustrate and corroborate the informants' views and experiences. The researcher's notes are integrated into the discussion of the empirical data to discern nuances in the information, views and meanings shared by the informants.

The discussion of the findings addresses the first five of the below six research questions.

- 1) How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?
- 2) How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?
- 3) What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?
- 4) What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?

- 5) What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?
- 6) What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?

The empirical findings are described in a framework of thick description to fulfil the first and second purposes defined as follows.

- 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students;
- 2) To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong;
- 3) To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong.

The sixth research question and third research purpose related to the implications of caring pedagogy are discussed in the "Chapter 5 Discussion", which offers analytical and conceptual expositions of the findings based on the corroborated literature to shed light on the issue of caring pedagogy. Figure 3 depicts the "Informants' Profiles with Representative Quotes". Figure 4 represents the "Relationships between Research Purposes, Research Questions, and Major Domains Emerging from the Data".

**Figure 3. Informants' Profiles with Representative Quotes**

Student	Gender	Discipline	Representative Quotes
Amelia	Female	Management	<p><i>"(Academics' care) is like an unwavering back-up. It's just like we're fighting a battle at the front. If there's a caring academic, I will feel that he/she is managing the subsistence supplies at the back. I will never worry about the issue of subsistence supplies. However, if the academic is not caring, (I will fear that he/she) will set the fire to the subsistence supplies at any time. The feeling, the contrast is great. Because when I feel that, (I) am not sure whether he/she will back me at the rear. I feel helpless ..... Somehow, it's psychologically comforting. I may not need to 'use' the help available. But, you know, there's always someone there. He/she will offer help whenever I am in need."</i></p> <p><i>"You feel that you are one of the masses. The feeling's awful. In other words, you feel like you are faceless, without eyes, ears or nose, just sitting there, like a monolithic statue. But the problem is you are not. Everyone has unique characteristics. And if we are made obscure by you, it appears that you are not respecting us as human beings."</i></p> <p><i>"In your pursuit of a 4.0 (GPA), you can share and study happily to achieve the 4.0 or struggle painfully to get the 4.0. To me, happiness is a very important thing. Studying should be a happy process. Like my mother says, 'If one studies too hard, one may commit suicide.' Because if you can't get what you want, it will be heart-rending! What's the point of being so stressed and so worried?"</i></p>
Esther	Female	Management	<p><i>"Academics' care can be applied to many aspects, starting from how the academics prepare teaching materials, scheme of work and notes. If (the academics) prepare (teaching) genuinely from the bottom of their hearts and make me understand (the subject matter) ..... Perhaps these points show the academics' detailed-mindedness and care."</i></p>
Eva	Female	Management	<p><i>"Learning to ride a bicycle" for the facilitator role of academics' care as follows, "When you learn how to ride a bicycle, there's someone aiding you at the beginning. When he/she thinks that your ride is pretty good, he/she will fade out gradually. Perhaps there's just a voice directing you, and that's it. You have to put your own endeavour into it. The facilitator is just there to accompany you at the beginning. When help is no longer needed at the end, he/she will watch over your ride to finish the whole journey. He/she will be there to accompany you (from a distance). He/she will definitely accompany you. That's the facilitator."</i></p>
Isabella	Female	Management	<p><i>"I don't want to confine my relationships with my professors to my three years of university study. In the long run, after embarking on my career, I want to share my life and work. If I encounter difficulties in my prospective career, I will seek advice from the professors. Then, if my prospective career can be of use to them, I'll help them. An interactive relationship."</i></p>

**Figure 3. Informants' Profiles with Representative Quotes (Continued)**

Student	Gender	Discipline	Representative Quotes
Joey	Female	Management	<i>"The academic may be strict, but he/she is serious about preparing for class. This can be a kind of care, an example of caring about the students. It doesn't mean that he/she must be very 'caring' about the students; we call it 'caring about us'. That can't be denied."</i>
Mandy	Female	Management	<i>"I think I need both (independence and care about me). I'll seek you out if I have problems. But you also have to show me that you care about me ..... (We) need an academic who cares about us, and asks about us."</i>
Mia	Female	Management	<i>"You are grown up, and you can't hold the hands of the academics and pester them to chat with you ..... I perceive that the academics see us as mature. They will not spoon-feed us like in the earlier stages (of primary or secondary school). But the proclivity still exists. In other words, (we) subconsciously still want spoon-feeding ..... Step by step (like in a transition). When you enter society, no one cares about you. If you don't ask questions, no one will care. When you were in secondary school, everyone cared about you very much. Then you go to the university before entering society. It's in between, a transition, whether they care about you or not. I think a not-too-close relationship is normal. Will care be discounted? Of course, it will. Anyway, in the end, it is a transition."</i>
Olivia	Female	Management	<i>"(Care) shouldn't be lacking, even though university emphasizes students' initiative to learn and develop independence rather than follow the academics' words ..... Care in university doesn't have to be like the care in primary or secondary school. But it has to assure the students that an academic has taken on the role (to care for, be responsible for and coach the students). An academic is always there. Whenever I'm in need, I can seek help from (the academic). (The academic) will teach me and coach the students on how to cope with the changes and challenges."</i>
Ruth	Female	Management	<i>"University study is really different from studying at a younger age. When you were young, teachers had to tend to you. Teachers' responsibilities are changing (according to the different stages of development). (Teachers) are like nannies (when pupils are young); they take care of every aspect of you. When you grow up, you have to take care of yourself."</i>
Sophie	Female	Management	<i>"Care will make the learning attitudes totally different. No matter what kinds of problems I face, I need someone to support me, someone to care about me. My attitudes will be more positive. I have to learn independence in university. But in a way, (we) need support and help from others."</i>
James	Male	Management	<i>"(Academics' care) is helping students grow, but in a very abstract way, as though it's invisible ..... That's an invisible hand. In order for students to learn, there must be someone right behind to take care of them. Learning will then be more effective. To many students, academics' care is the invisible pillar behind them."</i>

**Figure 4. Relationships between Research Purposes, Research Questions, and Major Domains Emerging from the Data**

<b>Research Purposes</b>	<b>Purpose 1:</b> <i>To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students</i>	<b>Purpose 2:</b> <i>To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong</i>
<b>Research Questions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?</li> <li>2. How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?</li> <li>4. What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?</li> <li>5. What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?</li> </ol>
<b>Narrative Sections in Findings</b>	A continuum of academics' care	Deconstructing the qualities, perceived effects and meanings of academics' care
<b>Domains from Coding</b>	<p>Pedagogical care: Instructional quality</p> <p>Holistic care: Safety net</p> <p>Sustainable care: Reciprocal care with long-term orientation</p>	<p>Essential qualities as engendered by the cardinal quality of trust</p> <p>Perceived effects of academics' care on learning, development and well-being</p> <p>Safety net and sustainable bonding as meanings of academics' care</p>

#### **4.2. A Continuum of Academics' Care**

Academics' care was conceptualized as a continuum of care, moving along the continuum from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care". This continuum featured a maturing of relationships and a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity. As such, academics' care was perceived as relationship-oriented and interconnected by the central thread of caring teacher-student relationships. Although the beginnings of the teacher-student interactions were determined and

structured by their official social roles, the budding of a caring teacher-student relationship and a sustainable bonding was fuelled by academics' care.

Eva succinctly captured the essence of academics' care as follows, *"(Academics' care) is a relationship. I see care as the beginning of relationship (and) its continuity."*

Academics' care was initiated from the faculty members in their structural relations with the students and went beyond the fundamental teaching duties of an academic. The structural relations per se were not care-oriented interactions. Teachers could engage in structural relations with students, but without caring about them. Caring, friendly and less hierarchical interactions brimming with academics' care for the students contributed to cultivating caring teacher-student relationships. As such, academics' care was driven by the passion that motivated academics to teach their subjects well and do something extra to facilitate the students' learning. It was the core element contributing to the cultivation and gradual maturation of genuine caring teacher-student relationships.

Amelia thoughtfully expressed the following, *"(Academics' care) is a kind of relationship. If no relationship is established, (the academics) will not treat the students from the heart. Could this be called a kind of care then?"* Amelia continued that *"The word 'care' is referred to as a kind of concern; as such, it is genuinely from the heart. It is also a kind of emotional interaction."*

With relationships as its central construct, academics' care was conceptualized as the bond that interconnected academics and students in caring relationships and facilitated the continuity and maturity of those relationships. It was not only driven by the psychological disposition or passionate drive of academics to give care to their students, but was also translated into concrete actions to guide and mentor students so as to facilitate their learning and holistic development and enhance their well-being. The informants thus conceptualized it as a continuum of care.



A continuum of academics' care featured the movement from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care". "Pedagogical Care" was a uni-directional flow of care focusing on students' academic concerns and hence translated into academics' teaching the subject well. "Holistic Care" related to different aspects of students' lives and featured a deepening of trust, relationships and mutual engagement. It was perceived as a "Safety Net". "Sustainable Care" was distinguished by its reciprocal care with a long-term orientation and "Sustainable Bonding". It featured a further deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity. The conceptualized continuum of academics' care is discussed in the following sections.

#### **4.2.1. Pedagogical Care: Instructional Quality**

In the realm of "Pedagogical Care", academics' care was uni-directional and was initiated and emanated from the academics to the students with minimal reciprocity. The structural teacher-student relations as shaped by their official capacities delineated the initial boundary of academics' care and oriented its focus towards study. This influenced the purposes and modes of the teacher-student interactions. The academics expressed their care for the students by addressing their fundamental concerns about the students' academic results. As such, they were committed to their fundamental teaching responsibilities for disseminating knowledge and teaching subjects well. Reciprocity was at a minimum, as reflected in the students' role as the recipients of academics' care, and hence was limited to the students' acknowledgment of the care. This contrasted with the students' initiative in seeking advice from the academics on different aspects of life when moving to "Holistic Care" and their deliberate efforts to return the care and favours shown to them or offer help when moving to "Sustainable Care", a point discussed later.

Amelia thoughtfully wrote the following in her write-up account, *"Teachers do far more than just share their knowledge with us. An (ancient) Chinese*

*scholar said, '(Teacher's responsibilities are to) propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts.'"*

The students expected the academics to teach the subjects well, which they considered a fundamental way of expressing academics' care. They considered that the academics had two major duties, research and teaching. As such, they considered that the academics fulfilled their teaching duties by disseminating knowledge. Through daily contact with the academics, the informants distinguished the subtle and nuanced differences between the caring academics who cared about students' needs and those who merely assumed their teaching duties. The caring academics were perceived as committed to doing more than the teaching duties and responsibilities entailed, as opposed to those academics who just did their teaching jobs. A passionate academic showed that he/she genuinely cared about the students through his/her "Pedagogical Care".

The informants were impressed by the academics' "ownership" of their learning needs and study problems and how they took care of them. The caring academics, who were passionate and genuinely cared about the students' learning, spent a lot of effort planning, preparing and orchestrating the delivery of subject content in addition to taking ownership of their problems. This was shown in the students' meticulous descriptions of their experiences with academics' care. The caring and unpretentious teaching practices helped them learn and apply the subject matter.

*Esther explained the following thoughtfully, "Academics' care can be applied to many aspects, starting from how the academics prepare teaching materials, scheme of work and notes. If (the academics) prepare (teaching) genuinely from the bottom of their hearts and make me understand (the subject matter) ..... Perhaps these points show the academics' detailed-mindedness and care."*

*Joey said the following in a pragmatic tone, "The academic may be strict, but he/she is serious about preparing for class. This can be a kind of care, an example of caring about the students. It doesn't mean that he/she must*

*be very 'caring' about the students; we call it 'caring about us'. That can't be denied."*

The students further elaborated on the academics' "Pedagogical Care". They started by emphasizing the importance of academics' writing a well-structured and detailed scheme of work that specified the learning outcomes, unambiguous requirements and assessment criteria for assignments. They stressed the academics' preparedness for class, including having well-designed teaching aids, teaching notes and PowerPoint slides to enhance their delivery of the subject matter. They expected the academics to teach both theoretical and applied knowledge with insights so as to facilitate their applications of theories to the real world. Moreover, the qualities of teacher-student interactions during knowledge dissemination were considered as important for the informants to experience academics' care. Clear and detailed elaboration of the learning concepts, supplemented and enriched by plenty of interesting, relevant and real-life examples and preferably the sharing of personal experiences, illustrated the academics' care. The academics' shared personal experiences served as effective means to illustrate the learning concepts and address the students' learning needs, as they struck a chord with the students and effectively illustrated the applications of abstract concepts to the real-life setting.

*Mandy indicated the following, "(The passionate academic) gives feedback on the applicability of students' sharing of examples, or uses another example to elaborate on their examples. The students feel that the academic listens to them seriously and pays serious thought to their opinions. 'Passion' is a good word to summarize this."*

The students appreciated the learner-centred nature of the classes. The caring academics took the initiatives to devise different interesting and effective means of delivering subject knowledge in response to the students' learning needs. For examples, they arranged more activities and discussions in class, and made use of the students' opinions shared in class to stimulate further interactions. They customized their teaching pace to accommodate the students' learning progress. They took the initiative to arrange

consultation sessions and extra tutorial sessions to make sure the students understood the concepts. They provided clear direction and guidelines and specified assessment requirements for project assignments. They addressed the students' problems by providing comprehensive answers, even beyond the scope of the original questions asked, and following up with any enquiries. They were willing to arrange consultation sessions to provide further guidance on how to complete the projects. The academics' care for the students and the efforts they made to teach the subjects well in response to the students' learning needs and concerns for their study were considered as expressions of "Pedagogical Care".

In terms of "Pedagogical Care", care was a pervasive concern for the academics in their approach to student learning. The informants valued that their learning needs were being taken care of. For example, they were impressed by and felt cared for due to the efforts academics made to ensure they understood the knowledge and concepts taught. The academics customized ways to disseminate knowledge, teach the concepts better and explicate theories in a clear fashion. The students considered the academics' learner-centred approach, serious attitudes towards teaching and efforts to teach a subject well as important aspects and concrete ways of expressing "Pedagogical Care" and thereby academics' care.

As expressed in the academics' meticulous concerns about and concrete means of addressing the students' learning needs, "Pedagogical Care" facilitated the students' understanding of the subjects. This saved the students' time in seeking consultations from the academics. Seeking academic consultations was just one facet of the teacher-student interactions and hence one aspect of academics' care. The informants considered that they might not need to seek extra academic advice if the academics had well-prepared and well-delivered teaching content and provided students with full support and guidance on assignments. Considering this, students who did not seek

academics' advice did not necessarily experience a lack of academics' care or an indifferent attitude.

*Esther indicated the following, "Somehow, I don't need to ask for help later, perhaps because the academics' well-prepared scheme of work and notes have already complemented (the teaching and learning processes). This has reflected academics' care."*

The students found it unnecessary to seek additional academic advice, as their study problems had been well addressed by the faculty members. They experienced academics' care, rather than a lack of it. The academics' initiative and efforts to well prepare the whole teaching process, from writing the scheme of work to arranging consultation sessions, pre-empted the informants from seeking unnecessary consultations. This showed the extent of the academics' care as driven by their passion and genuine concern for the students, evidencing "Pedagogical Care".

The quality of the consultation sessions was also important for the students to experience academics' care. Consultations from the academics were sought on subjects such as difficult conceptual knowledge and group project assignments. In particular, group project consultations were a major concern for the students. Project assignments comprised a significant weighting of their overall assessment, and hence their grades and GPA in a way hinged on the performance of their projects. Thus, consultation sessions were considered as a critical point of contact in experiencing academics' care.

Some informants did not consider GPA as the most important thing in their university study. However, the students were generally preoccupied with ensuring a high academic performance. Although the students admitted that their academic results were not sufficient because prospective employers looked for all-round candidates, a high GPA was still seen as valid proof of their capabilities. This might explain why the informants were so concerned about ensuring a good academic performance, their future careers and

prospects hinged on it. Their goal-oriented study attitudes might have also been shaped by their backgrounds. All but one of the informants had taken higher diploma or associate degree courses before promoted to bachelor's degree courses, due to their unsatisfactory public examination results. This experience drove them to study very hard to get good grades. Given the status of Hong Kong as a materialistic and meritocratic society, they were inculcated with such a mind-set, which led them to place a high value on their academic results. Hence, they believed that academics who genuinely cared about them would be willing to help them ensure high academic results. This might illuminate why "Pedagogical Care" was conceptualized as the initiation of academics' care.

*Esther stated the following, "Academics' care means helping me get a high GPA." Esther went on to elucidate that "In a very broad definition, academics' care, to me, first, the academics have to be very knowledgeable, very well-prepared for teaching. Second, they have to be kind and conduct many consultations, give me plenty of advice on the assignments. What's even better is career advice. The meanings of academics' well-preparing for class and conducting constructive consultations are helping me get good results. Third, in terms of the future, many of our concerns are career related. Honestly, getting good results will help us get good jobs in the future. To me, these three aspects will in fact help me graduate with a bachelor's degree. They will determine my future prospects. To me, academics' care can help me achieve these things."*

The students' apparent short-term goals of obtaining high academic results, as expressed in their expectations of academics' care, reflected their long-term views on their future careers and prospects. They believed that good academic results would have profound effects on their careers. They saw university study as the last formal learning stage in life and a bridge to their future. As such, "Pedagogical Care" as driven by the caring academics' passion and genuine concern for the students was an important way of expressing the academics' care, as they addressed the students' major apprehension about their future prospects. This view was further corroborated by some informants' emphasis on the importance of the efforts the academics put into developing their critical

thinking, professional knowledge and quality and practical skills for coping with the challenges anticipated in their prospective careers and adult life. The students were serious about their careers and prospects and hence their academic results. The seemingly unrelated academic and non-academic matters, in addition to the students' short-term academic goals and long-term visions for their prospective careers and adult life, were connected. This revealed the students' sophisticated, mature and long-term view towards obtaining a high GPA. Academics' care was considered as a vital means of helping students fulfil their career aspirations. Thus, the students experienced academics' care through the academics' "Pedagogical Care".

To move from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" along the continuum of academics' care, the students had to overcome their reserved attitudes. This was achieved through the academics' care expressed as "Pedagogical Care" under which caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships with deepened engagement were gradually established. The importance of trust is discussed further in a later section. As a result of building up trust, the purview of academics' care was no longer limited to the subject matter or definitive semester time. As mutual engagement deepened, academics' care was expanded to different aspects of the students' lives, with a heightened commitment and involvement from both the academics and students. It was then conceptualized as "Holistic Care", which involved attending to more than pedagogical concerns. A "Safety Net" was identified as one of the overarching themes throughout the informants' discussions of their experiences with "Holistic Care" and in the academics' care they received as a whole.

#### **4.2.2. Holistic Care: Safety Net**

The movement along the continuum of academics' care from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" was manifested in the deepening of mutual commitment from both the

academics and students. With its implication that help would be offered continually, the “Safety Net” formed the central construct of “Holistic Care” in facilitating and mentoring students’ holistic growth. After trust was established through experiencing “Pedagogical Care”, students became more engaged in their teacher-student relationships. They then took the initiative in seeking help from the academics on a wider scope of deeper issues, rather than simply study matters alone. With the students and academics’ deepened engagement in their teacher-student relationships, academics’ care expanded to concerns about different aspects of the students’ lives.

Amelia thoughtfully wrote the following in her write-up account, *“Teachers do far more than just share their knowledge with us. An (ancient) Chinese scholar said, ‘(Teacher’s responsibilities are to) propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts.’”* Amelia added, *“A teacher demonstrating academics’ care is performing not only his/her responsibilities, but also something more.”*

The informants believed that the caring academics who were driven by their passion and genuinely cared about students were willing and able to guide them to cope with personal problems and prospective career challenges in addition to academic matters. The final-year students had to cope with heavy workloads in their study; at the same time, they started contemplating their futures, considering career choices and looking for prospective jobs. This made them feel overwhelmed, anxious and uncertain about the challenges they anticipated facing in adult life. They expected to find someone they trusted to seek advice. As such, the caring academics, in their position of trust, became a significant other and resource for seeking advice on various matters and coached the students to cope with the anticipated challenges. For example, the students expected the academics to advise them on what kinds of careers would suit them, how to write a proper and professional resume, how to handle people issues at work and so forth. The academics who genuinely cared about the students were expected to assume a mentoring role and be committed to developing them holistically.



The students experienced “Holistic Care” through the caring academics’ advice and guidance on non-academic matters during their transition period to graduation. The transition from a protected, greenhouse-like environment in university to the anticipated competitive and ruthless work context appeared daunting. In the face of this, the informants considered the university context as a miniature of society, and hence considered this last formal learning stage as an ideal place to fully equip themselves with industry-specific knowledge, professional qualities, proper social etiquette and especially sophisticated interpersonal skills to cope with people issues. The caring academics were seen as ideal persons to groom their professional development. The students believed the academics genuinely cared about them and hence were willing and able to share their past work experiences in their respective professions. The informants much appreciated the academics’ advice and guidance on their personal matters and career choices. Thus, the students experienced academics’ care through the caring academics’ help and mentorship in facilitating their professional and holistic development.

The students felt reluctant to seek advice from their parents, university counsellors or friends. First, they did not want to make their parents feel worried and their parents probably lacked the industry-specific knowledge necessary to help them cope with career challenges. The students also felt uncomfortable and reluctant to share personal and career issues, and even study concerns, with counsellors from the university. Those counsellors were seen as strangers who were too remote and had no emotional attachment. Worse still, they did not know the students in person, and failed to provide customized advice in response to their specific backgrounds, characters, capabilities and needs. Their advice would probably have been too general and failed to really help the students in specific ways. They also lacked industry-specific knowledge and hence failed to share relevant experience with the students that would strike a chord with them. Furthermore, the students probably considered their friends’ advice as not perceptive enough, given that their friends were as green as they were. As a result, the students felt grateful to the caring academics, who were willing to share their personal experiences to

let them know what the academics had gone through, especially in relation to similar challenges encountered during their study and careers and ways to positively cope with those challenges. By listening and learning from the academics' personal experiences, the students felt that they were not alone. They could learn from the academics' valuable experiences and success in overcoming certain challenges, even in apparently hopeless situations. This struck a chord with the students, who saw the academics as inspirational role models.

Esther explained the following, *"If the faculty members do not know you, they will not understand your situation. If I ask, let's say, the academics, who know about me after having taught me several times, they know about my capabilities and what kind of person I am, and perhaps will give me more personalized advice."*

Sophie expressed the following, *"I don't want to talk to a stranger about my personal and private issues or about my future career. When I feel confused and am facing problems, I don't want to talk to a stranger. I want to talk to a close academic."*

Olivia shared the following, *"When I appreciate an academic, I trust him/her. Thus, I'll approach him/her to seek advice ..... I'm not the kind of person who likes sharing personal matters with others. Approaching university counsellors whom I haven't contacted before to share something private and deep would make me feel very anxious. It's not about lacking confidence (in university counsellors' professional abilities). Perhaps, if I had a choice, I would find an academic who has spent the time with me for at least one semester. The degree of trust would be much greater."*

These representative quotations reflected the importance of developing a caring, close and bonded teacher-student relationship and implied the significance of the trust the students required before they could feel comfortable with seeking advice from the academics. Trust as cultivated by academics' care was the central quality in overcoming the students' psychological hurdles in seeking help from the faculty members on non-academic matters. As such, they experienced academics' care through the academics'

unwavering commitment to always be there, ready to help and mentor them on personal, career and other matters. In particular, they were deeply impressed by and appreciative of the extra time and efforts the academics spent on helping and coaching them. With the caring academics' unswerving commitment to continually providing help, academics' care gradually developed into a "Safety Net" for the students. The "Safety Net" served as a secure base to which the students could return to whenever they were in need of help and provided a buffer against the vicissitudes of life.

The "Safety Net" has been identified as key construct in "Holistic Care" and one of the overarching themes of academics' care. In this case, it was embodied in the continual availability of help, which necessitated the academics' extra time and efforts in caring about and mentoring the students. This was perceived as a significant part of the "Safety Net". Facing the time limitations every day, the extra time and efforts the academics put into caring about and mentoring the students evidenced their care in a concrete way, as they were willing to sacrifice their private time and spend additional efforts beyond their job description. The informants used the term "job description" in reference to their perceptions of an academic's "normal" teaching job duties, such as their teaching lectures and practices for handling relevant matters within office hours. Anything beyond their perceptions of "normal" teaching duties was seen as doing something extra, or duties "beyond one's job description". Examples included replying to emails on weekends, conducting more consultation sessions with the students in guiding their project assignments and providing consultations on non-academic matters. The informants perceived that the academics' spent extra time and efforts due to their passion for caring about students. Academics' care was conceptualized as doing something extra for the students and being committed to developing them holistically. This led the students to see academics' care as a bonus.

James expressed the following, *"(Academics' care) is a bonus beyond academic interactions. Academics' care is driven by the academics'*

*motivation. As such, (academics' care) is undeniably something extra and important, beyond the scope of teaching in class."*

Joey indicated the following, *"If (the academics) teach the subjects well and care about me, this is the best and a bonus ..... I think the most important thing is the learning process. Everything else is a bonus."*

Sophie shared the following, *"(Helping with) career (-related matters) is a bonus."*

The informants perceived academics' care as bonus, something beyond their expectations of the academics' fundamental teaching duties. They felt obliged to the academics' extra workloads, which included the extra time and efforts the academics spent on offering different kinds of help with academic and non-academic matters, organizing additional tutorial sessions to make sure that challenging and complicated concepts were well understood, arranging flexible and additional consultation sessions on projects and other matters, providing customized advice and replying to their emails instantaneously and/or after office hours. The caring academics' willingness to sacrifice their own time and spend more than the expected efforts on helping and mentoring the students led the students to experience academics' care.

Mandy said the following in a tone of elated disbelief, *"(The academic) replied to emails on Saturdays. That's a miracle! ..... I feel very surprised, very impressed, that (the academic) sent us emails on Saturdays."* Mandy went on to elaborate the implicit and significant meanings of replying to emails after office hours and instantaneously in the context of academics' care, *"I feel that I am close to the academic's heart; that he/she pays attention to me, my learning progress and my situations; and that he/she is concerned about me ..... I couldn't imagine the academic replying to my email after ONE HOUR. Because he/she really cares about me; and only because of this, he/she left the work (and replied to students' emails)."*

Esther explained how the academics' care was distinguished by their caring attitudes and behavior in a way that showed concern and consideration

for the students, *“The academic is very willing (to arrange consultation appointments with the students). Generally speaking, arranging consultation appointments can be very difficult. I understand that we (the academics and I) are all busy. The (caring) academic welcomed us to stop by (his/her office at any time), just to ask a couple of questions, and leave. I feel that’s really good.”*

James reminisced about an exemplary case of academics’ care related to organizing extra voluntary tutorial classes, *“The academic was very nice. He/she did something extra beyond his/her job description. He/she was willing to spend his/her personal time on helping the students. The extra tutorial classes were voluntary. I felt, and every student felt, very surprised. I saw a lot of students become interested in the subject because of this, because of those extra classes. The academic really spent his/her personal time on genuinely helping the students from the heart. He/she truly wanted the students to fully understand the knowledge.”* Although James did not participate in those extra classes, he did show much appreciation for the academics doing something extra beyond their job descriptions and genuinely from the heart.

The students experienced academics’ care through the extra time and efforts the academics spent on them. It all boiled down to the academics genuinely caring about them. The informants believed that the academics would not have been willing to sacrifice their personal time or take the initiative in putting extra efforts into helping them if they felt otherwise. They believed that the academics’ passion and genuine care came from the bottom of their hearts. Thus, the extra time and efforts spent buttressed the overarching theme of the “Safety Net”.

Conceptualizing academics’ care as a “Safety Net” reflected the students’ progression to adulthood. They were mature and well aware that studying in university was the last important stage of formal learning before entering society. The informants emphasized developing into autonomous, independent and mature adults with critical minds and being able to cope with problems independently in their discussions of the contributions of academics’ care to facilitation of their holistic growth at university. “Holistic Care” was

thus perceived as a way to develop students into full-fledged adults during the transition from university study to daily life in society.

Academics' care in the university context was thus conceptualized in contrast to the "tending" and "spoon-feeding" kinds of care in the pre-school and primary and secondary school settings. The academics were not expected to take care of students in a "microscopic" way, but rather developing their critical thinking and independence, which were considered as important factors with far-reaching effects on their prospective careers and adult life. The informants considered university as the last formal stage of learning to cope with anticipated challenges. They acknowledged that they should depend less on the academics to spoon feed them. They were caught in an ambivalent feeling, they had to learn to become more independent in studying and addressing their own problems, yet still expected more care from the academics. As such, they struggled over determining how to address and cope with the different modes of interactions with the academics, in addition to the different styles of teacher-student relationships in university compared with primary or secondary school.

Ruth expressed the following, *"University study is really different from studying at a younger age. When you were young, teachers had to tend to you. Teachers' responsibilities are changing (according to the different stages of development). (Teachers) are like nannies (when pupils are young); they take care of every aspect of you. When you grow up, you have to take care of yourself."*

Mia said the following in a business-like tone, *"You are grown up, and you can't hold the hands of the academics and pester them to chat with you ..... I perceive that the academics see us as mature. They will not spoon-feed us like in the earlier stages (of primary or secondary school). But the proclivity still exists. In other words, (we) subconsciously still want spoon-feeding ..... Step by step (like in a transition). When you enter society, no one cares about you. If you don't ask questions, no one will care. When you were in secondary school, everyone cared about you very much. Then you go to the university before entering society. It's in between, a*

*transition, whether they care about you or not. I think a not-too-close relationship is normal. Will care be discounted? Of course, it will. Anyway, in the end, it is a transition."*

*Esther indicated the following, "After we entered university, the professors kept reminding us, 'You are grown up!' (We) accept that we are in a stage different from primary or secondary school. We have to change our mind-sets."*

University study was like a rite of passage for the students to grow up. During their university study, they were instilled with the idea and constantly reminded that they were young adults and hence had to learn to be independent, rather than overly relying on the academics. They had to face the reality that they had grown up and were progressing into a more mature stage of life. As such, university students were conceptualized by the informants as autonomous and independent persons, and university was conceptualized as a place that embraced freedom, autonomy and independence and provided the students with a large scope of freedom to find their own paths and explore their own ways of learning. The students had to learn to be independent and expect less spoon-feeding and tending kinds of care.

However, seeing university as a place to develop students' independence might have generated a sense of aloofness, apathy and indifference. The faculty members' hands-off approach to grooming students to become independent might have sometimes left them with an impression of indifference and made them feel dampened and discouraged.

Mandy pondered the dilemma of the hands-off approach to developing university students' independence vis-à-vis being more engaged in caring about those students, *"I think I need both (independence and care about me). I'll seek you out if I have problems. But you also have to show me that you care about me."* Mandy also expressed, *"(We) need an academic who cares about us, and asks about us."*

Sophie expressed the following candidly, *“Care will make the learning attitudes totally different. No matter what kinds of problems I face, I need someone to support me, someone to care about me. My attitudes will be more positive. I have to learn independence in university. But in a way, (we) need support and help from others.”*

Olivia stated the following, *“(Care) shouldn’t be lacking, even though university emphasizes students’ initiative to learn and develop independence rather than follow the academics’ words ..... Care in university doesn’t have to be like the care in primary or secondary school. But it has to assure the students that an academic has taken on the role (to care for, be responsible for and coach the students). An academic is always there. Whenever I’m in need, I can seek help from (the academic). (The academic) will teach me and coach the students on how to cope with the changes and challenges.”*

The students expected the academics to provide them with more detailed guidance and personalized mentoring for their issues and to give them unwavering support. The students desired the academics to take the initiative in caring about them. In the end, they were not rejected when they approached the faculty to seek help on reasonable requests. Reasonable requests included seeking further elaboration of concepts or class demonstrations, advice on how to complete the project assignments and so forth. If the faculty did not respond to these reasonable requests, the students were very disappointed and felt hurt, helpless and vulnerable. They also lost interest in studying the particular subjects. It was necessary to point out that the informants were brilliant, diligent and responsible students with serious attitudes towards learning. They were not those students who would shirk their responsibilities or take advantage of the faculty members. Thus, it was illuminating to discover that these highly motivated students also felt vulnerable, helpless, hurt, dampened and discouraged in their studies when their legitimate efforts to seek help were rejected. This might shed light on the far-reaching implications of academics’ care for university students’ well-being and for the help offered to at-risk students.



However, the ambivalent attitudes could be attributed to the informants' transition from university students to adults. During this transition, they saw themselves as straddling student and adult life and oscillated between expecting to be cared for and being independent. From a cognitive standpoint, they assumed the identity and responsibilities of young adults and hence acknowledged that they had to cope with problems independently. Nevertheless, from an emotion standpoint, it was still rather hard for them to get rid of the so-called habit of depending on teachers to take care of them. They expected care from the academics in the face of adverse situations and negative emotions. In particular, when they faced current and anticipated challenges in their studies and prospective careers and hence felt perplexed, helpless, vulnerable and despondent, they expected the academics to care about them and provide them with guidance. This might explain the students' ambivalent attitudes and expectations of academics' care.

The students accepted the academics' hands-off approach, as long as they experienced academics' care. They were well aware that as university students, they had to learn to be independent to cope with challenges, rather than relying on academics. They saw the hands-off approach as important in preparing them to cope with anticipated challenges upon graduation. They were impressed by the academics' commitment to making them more independent in dealing with study problems or other issues. As such, they accepted the hands-off approach, as long as they were able to return to the academics to seek help, support and guidance whenever they were in need. The hands-off approach was not one of indifference. This shaped the informants' expectations of academics' care.

In this way, the significance of "Holistic Care" in facilitating holistic growth was reflected in the informants' discussions of the academics' role as facilitator in the university context. Academics' care did not clear away the problems of students, but provided them with professional advice to let them solve the problems by themselves and facilitate their

learning and holistic development. Thus, the informants often mentioned the facilitating roles of mentor and coach<sup>10</sup>.

The students experienced academics' care under the mentorship of the academics. They appreciated the academics' concern and initiative in coaching their personal and professional development, giving them direction and enlightening ideas on how to choose, explore and pursue their paths, and advising them on how to solve problems. In other words, they valued their mentors for providing guidance and support whenever they were in need. They accepted the hierarchical relations embedded in the mentor-mentee relationship, much like those in the teacher-student relationships. This acceptance might have been shaped by *Wu Lun* in the Chinese culture, according to which the senior is expected to protect and care for the junior. Thus, the importance of mentorship was embedded in the facilitator role as expressed in "Holistic Care".

"Holistic Care" was expressed in the academics' facilitator role, which reinforced the overarching theme of the "Safety Net". The students experienced academics' care through the academics' practices of watching over and reminding them, giving them direction and advice and stimulating their thoughts at the periphery. This was in contrast to the academics becoming directly involved in the process to help the students in a microscopic way, or as the informants put, "holding students' hands to mould them and closely restrict them on how to complete the tasks". The academics emphasized the importance of autonomy in the course of grooming the students' development. As such, the informants used three salient metaphors to shed light on the facilitating role of academics' care, "Learning to ride a bicycle", "Invisible hand" and "Subsistence (food) supplies in military operations".

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<sup>10</sup> As the informants referred to the two terms "Mentor" and "Coach" interchangeably with considerably overlapping meanings, the term "Mentor" was used to represent the two. This was done in the view that the term "Mentor" carried more significant meaning related to advising and helping that embodied the informants' views on seeking advice, guidance and help from the academics than the term "Coach" which carried more weighted meanings related to training and teaching.

To begin with, the metaphor of “Learning to ride a bicycle” clearly showed how the students conceptualized the facilitator role of “Holistic Care” as watching over, directing and guiding them to protect them in a remote-controlled style.

Eva explained the metaphor of “Learning to ride a bicycle” for the facilitator role of academics’ care as follows, *“When you learn how to ride a bicycle, there’s someone aiding you at the beginning. When he/she thinks that your ride is pretty good, he/she will fade out gradually. Perhaps there’s just a voice directing you, and that’s it. You have to put your own endeavour into it. The facilitator is just there to accompany you at the beginning. When help is no longer needed at the end, he/she will watch over your ride to finish the whole journey. He/she will be there to accompany you (from a distance). He/she will definitely accompany you. That’s the facilitator.”*

The facilitator was expected to watch over and accompany the students as they rode along their journey towards the finish. As such, academics’ care was conceptualized as watching over the students from a distance and giving them direction, advice and guidance to prevent them from falling, rather than directly holding their hand while they completed each tiny task. Feelings of security, assurance and comfort were also implied in the informant’s metaphor, because the facilitator was always by the side of the students ready to direct and guide them. This reinforced the overarching theme of the “Safety Net”.

The metaphor of “Learning to ride a bicycle” reflected the students’ expectation that academics’ care would facilitate their growth into mature, independent and full-fledged adults. This was contrary to the spoon-feeding kind of care as seen in the pre-school, primary school and secondary school contexts. It was in sharp contrast to the deliberate intervention and interference into students’ trial and error and their own exploration. The importance of facilitating the students from a distance, rather than holding their hands tight to mould and force them, was expressed in the metaphor of “Invisible hand”.

James remarked the following thoughtfully, *“(Academics’ care) is helping students grow, but in a very abstract way, as though it’s invisible.”* James also elucidated the role of academics’ care using the metaphor of the “Invisible hand”, *“That’s an invisible hand. In order for students to learn, there must be someone right behind to take care of them. Learning will then be more effective. To many students, academics’ care is the invisible pillar behind them.”* James went on to elaborate, *“(The intersection of (academics’ care) may link to the pedagogy, the system or the process. It’s really the odds and ends at the periphery linking to the class, to the lectures. (Caring academics) are really at the periphery, watching over the students at the periphery, and they can’t be seen in a concrete way. (Academics’ care) can’t be counted, and students’ growth can’t be measured. However, it is there.”*

James also shared his experiences of discussing international politics with his thesis supervisor, *“Those (international politics) were obviously out of the subject topics. But after the discussions, I have gained a lot. This is more important than getting a 4.0 (GPA) ..... Academics’ care is something that goes beyond the transcript. I think that’s perhaps even more important.”*

These two metaphors, “Learning to ride a bicycle” and the “Invisible hand”, have shown that academics’ care in a university context was no longer expected to be the spoon-feeding kind of care involving direct intervention and clearing and doing everything for students. The informants stressed the importance of the academics offering continually available help while watching over them. They appreciated the academics’ mentorship in advising them on how to cope with problems independently and explore their own learning paths. They considered this important for their future careers and prospects. Thus, they valued the academics’ care in facilitating and mentoring their holistic growth into autonomous and mature adults with critical minds. This consolidated the overarching theme of the “Safety Net”.

The overarching theme of the “Safety Net” was corroborated by one informant, Olivia, who spoke solemnly while stressing that never giving up on students was the essential

construct in academics' care. The significance of unwavering support in academics' care, built on the trusted and secure bond between the academics and students, was central to one informant's metaphor of "Subsistence (food) supplies in military actions".

Amelia explained the metaphor of "Subsistence (food) supplies in military operations" for academics' care as follows, *"(Academics' care) is like an unwavering back-up. It's just like we're fighting a battle at the front. If there's a caring academic, I will feel that he/she is managing the subsistence supplies at the back. I will never worry about the issue of subsistence supplies. However, if the academic is not caring, (I will fear that he/she) will set the fire to the subsistence supplies at any time. The feeling, the contrast is great. Because when I feel that, (I) am not sure whether he/she will back me at the rear. I feel helpless ..... Somehow, it's psychologically comforting. I may not need to 'use' the help available. But, you know, there's always someone there. He/she will offer help whenever I am in need."*

The metaphor stressed the feelings of security, assurance and psychological comfort of having someone trusted to offer support and guidance whenever students were in need. They expected that a truly caring academic would be always there for them to return to whenever they encountered any problems. It was not just about getting the academics' assistance or resources that mattered. The students might not have needed to seek help from the faculty members. Yet, whenever they were in need of help, they knew and were very well assured that the academics were always there, ready and able to help them. The feelings of assurance and "Trust" that the academics would always be available to offer unwavering support and extend help to them and the resultant psychological comfort and security were vital to the students. Amelia's metaphor was telling in that it shed light on the profound implications of academics' care for the promotion of students' psychological comfort and secure feelings and hence the enhancement of their well-being. This also corroborated and bolstered the overarching theme of the "Safety Net".

Isabella expressed the following, *“As far as personal development is concerned, the academics play a very important mentor role; they guide us on how to approach our prospects. We don’t have to follow the academics’ advice 100% of the time. When we are in need, (the academics) will give us some advice to untangle our thoughts. That’s very important.”*

This also reflected the students’ maturity and autonomy. They did not expect the faculty members to help them in microscopic ways by holding their hands to mould their actions, spoon-feeding them or becoming directly involved to solve problems for them. Instead, they expected the academics to provide them with guidance and insights into the issues, so that they would have clearer directions and thoughts on how to address the questions on their own. In doing so, the academics developed the students’ critical thinking. In sharp contrast to moulding the students’ minds, these facilitator roles were perceived as developing the students’ critical minds and independence in coping with challenges, rather than imprisoning their free minds, snipping their creativity or forcing them to rigidly follow each tiny step as stipulated. This reflected the informants’ aspirations and determination to develop themselves into autonomous, mature and full-fledged young adults able to positively cope with challenges upon graduation and thrive in their prospective careers. This substantiated the importance of facilitation and mentorship in academics’ care. Thus, it rebutted the claims of therapeutic discourse.

Facilitating holistic growth was embedded in the overarching theme of the “Safety Net”. Regardless of the formal learning stage, from pre-school to university, care was considered as important in facilitating students’ development. As such, the subtle differences between academics’ care in the university context and care in the previous stages were perceived as differences in the degree of teachers’ direct involvement. The students saw university study as the final formal learning stage in life before entering society. They valued this formal learning stage, not only because it allowed them to master subject- and industry-specific knowledge, but also because it enabled them to learn how to independently cope with anticipated challenges upon graduation and to

achieve holistic development. They unanimously agreed that independent learning was a vital means for them to develop into mature adults. They also recognized that academics' care in the university context should not involve being tended to in microscopic ways, being spoon-fed, or having their hands held as teachers taught them how to walk or write, as though they were still in kindergarten. Thus, the students conceptualized academics' care as a "Safety Net". They expected that they could seek help, advice and guidance from the academics whenever they were in need, instead of obstinately relegating everything to independent learning.

To avoid exaggerating the role of academics' care, it must be stated that students grow up regardless of the presence of a caring academic. Yet, without academics' care cultivating a "Safety Net" comprising unwavering support and continually available help, students' holistic growth might be impeded. They might have to struggle more and on their own, placing additional strain on their well-being. As such, academics' care contributed to building up a "Safety Net" for students, helping them to explore and thrive in their holistic development. In this case, moving on to "Holistic Care" involved a deepened and mutual engagement on behalf of both academics and students. The academics were committed and took the initiative in caring about and helping the students with different aspects of their lives. Meanwhile, the students responded to the academics' care by taking a more proactive approach, seeking advice and guidance from the academics about their current and anticipated concerns. The "Safety Net" was identified as one of the overarching themes. More importantly, the pervasiveness of the "Safety Net" was extended to the future with a long-term orientation when academics' care became "Sustainable Care".

#### 4.2.3. Sustainable Care: Reciprocal Care with Long-term Orientation

When it moved on to “Sustainable Care”, academics’ care was no longer limited to a uni-directional flow of care from the academics to the students. Having experienced academics’ care, the informants were eager to return the favours and care given to them by the academics. They had an affirmed willingness to help the academics. Despite their limitations, they were resourceful and offered help to the academics as best they could. For example, they were more considerate towards the caring academics and eager to give them constructive feedback on their teaching practices to help them improve their teaching skills.

Isabella expressed that students showed consideration for the caring academics, especially in their endeavour to care about the students despite their busy work schedules, *“(Academics’ care) is a mutually considerate relationship.”*

Olivia elaborated on the reciprocity shown as follows, *“When the caring academic and I have developed a trusted relationship, I will have the courage to make suggestions to him/her if I think of anything that will be helpful to him/her (for improving the teaching in class), in addition to expecting that he/she will give me advice uni-directionally.”*

In addition, the caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships that emanated from academics’ care were not limited to a definitive semester, but had a long-term orientation that extended to the future. The conclusion of the semester term marked the end of the faculty members’ official teaching obligations towards students. Nevertheless, the end of term time did not really put an end to academics’ care. The students wanted to maintain good relationships with the academics, as they perceived learning as an ongoing and accumulating process. They believed that if the academics cared about them, then the caring teacher-student relationships that originated from academics’ care should not be limited to one semester only, but extended to the future. They expected to be



able to approach the academics whenever they were in need of help in the present or prospective future for any matters or problems related to their further study and careers. Whenever they needed to seek consultation, they could return to the caring academics to seek advice and support due to the genuine academics' care. As such, they held a transcending view with a long-term orientation on academics' care and their relationships with the caring academics.

Eva said the following pragmatically, *"If the academics really treat you with academics' care, it should not be one semester only. It should not be confined to the time in university."*

Amelia expressed the following, *"A caring academic will even answer questions about future prospects, for example, how to approach career paths ..... It should not end after I complete (the caring academic's) class."*

Developing long-lasting relationships with caring academics was considered as an important buffer against the vicissitudes of life upon graduation. The students perceived academics' care as a relational construct with a long-term orientation towards the future. They expected the caring academics to continually help them cope with anticipated challenges in their careers and adult life. Academics' care was conceptualized as an ever-present safe haven and secure base to which they could return to seek comfort, support, help and advice whenever they found themselves in need during their current and prospective explorations of life, no matter how far they had drifted away or how their careers developed. A genuinely caring teacher-student relationship as driven by academics' care would transcend and withstand the test of time and not be limited by term time or official structural relations. Thus, in addition to the "Safety Net", "Sustainable Bonding" was identified as another overarching theme of academics' care.

It was also noteworthy that the students were willing to express care, extend help and return favours to the caring academics in the future as ways of reciprocating the care shown to them.

Isabella expressed the following sincerely, *“I don’t want to confine my relationships with my professors to my three years of university study. In the long run, after embarking on my career, I want to share my life and work. If I encounter difficulties in my prospective career, I will seek advice from the professors. Then, if my prospective career can be of use to them, I’ll help them. An interactive relationship.”*

This unexpected insight shed light on the uniqueness of academics’ care in the university context along with its long-term orientation and deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity. Considering the continuous flow of care from the academics to the students, reciprocal care has been generated by academics’ care as expressed in the students’ willingness and initiative in caring about the academics and returning their care in the future. The informants explained why they expected to return the favour in the future rather than the present. They felt that they might not yet have the required capabilities, knowledge or experiences to help the academics, because they were still students at this stage. However, they expected that they would gradually accumulate more knowledge and experiences in work and life and would one day be able to help and return the favour to the academics. Having been immersed in academics’ care, the cared-for students would gradually be socialized and take on the role of the one-caring. Thus, academics’ care became “Sustainable Care”, characterized by the deepening of mutual engagement, responsiveness and reciprocal care.

Academics’ care as driven by the academics’ passion and genuine care for the students was first discerned as “Pedagogical Care”. The academics were unpretentious and committed to teaching subject knowledge well to take care of their students’ most imminent and pressing concerns about acquiring the knowledge needed to cope with their prospective career development. With the continuous flow of academics’ care from the academics to the students, a caring, trusted, bonded teacher-student relationship was cultivated and a congenial and secure learning atmosphere was fostered. The academics’ offer of continual help and the extra time and efforts they committed to facilitating the

students' holistic growth moved their "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care", which featured a deepening of mutual engagement and commitment from both the academics' and students. The students gradually came to consider the academics' care as a "Safety Net". Serving as a safe haven and a secure base, the "Safety Net" was identified as one of the overarching themes in the informants' discussions of academics' care. Moving to "Sustainable Care", academics' care was distinguished by a further deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity. The students expected that they could return to seek help and advice from the academics when they encountered difficulties or faced challenges in the future. As such, the reciprocal care and long-term orientation embedded in "Sustainable Care" rendered "Sustainable Bonding" as another overarching theme of academics' care. With the continuous immersion in academics' care, the students were eager to extend help and return care to the caring academics as means of expressing their gratitude towards them. Reciprocal care was then distinguished as "Sustainable Care" and differentiated academics' care in the university context from that in school settings. This has implied the far-reaching implications of integrating care into pedagogy for students' learning, development and well-being, which are discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4.3. Deconstructing the Qualities, Perceived Effects and Meanings of Academics' Care**

##### **4.3.1. Essential Qualities as Engendered by the Cardinal Quality of Trust**

Trust has been identified as the cardinal quality of academics' care. It has served as the cornerstone and wellspring of other qualities pervasive in different levels of academics' care. Although not mentioned as often as other qualities, the students in this case stressed trust as a cardinal quality. In terms of salience, the informants emphasized that trust was very important, a top priority, the central element in a relationship, the starting point and main ingredient in the continuous maintenance of a long-lasting relationship

and so forth. A relationship without trust was considered as disingenuous. These remarks from the students justified that trust was a cardinal quality in academics' care and the weaving of its relational construct. Built on the cardinal quality of trust, passion and caring from the heart were identified as the quintessential qualities in academics' care. In addition, the academics' attitudes made a difference in determining whether the students experienced caring teacher-student interactions brimming with academics' care. Empathy, recognition, respect and positive attitudes were identified as the essential attitudinal qualities of academics' care. These qualities are discussed in the following sections.

### ***Trust***

As seen in the preceding discussions of the continuum of academics' care, "Pedagogical Care" might have been obscured due to its apparent overlap with fundamental teaching duties. Teaching subjects well, answering students' enquiries and being responsible for academic-related matters could be considered as teachers' job descriptions. Faculty members with excellent teaching techniques and strong communication skills were adept at elucidating very complicated and complex concepts. The informants considered them good teachers, but might not perceive them as caring teachers if those faculty members in a way fell short of conveying a feeling of genuine care. The point of contact with those good teachers remained in academic matters without spreading to other aspects of the students' lives. The informants saw that what distinguished a caring teacher from a good one lied in the academics' passion and commitment to caring about students, and their devotion to doing more than the teaching duties and responsibilities entailed, rather than just carrying out the job descriptions. It was a dialectical, vortex-like interaction process. The students had experienced academics' care and hence dialectically developed trust, and this led them to become more engaged in their teacher-student relationships and

make a more proactive effort to seek help and advice from the caring academics, experiencing deepened academics' care as a result.

Trust was an outcome and a significant contributor to maintaining a good teacher-student relationship and more importantly to sustaining and prospering from a caring teacher-student relationship. Trust was established after experiencing academics' care and became the cardinal quality and element to continuously build up and reinforce a caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationship. The students experienced academics' care and the trust intrinsic to it through everyday contact, although apparently trivial, with the academics. Official teacher-student contact was the starting point for building up trust. The students indicated that the degree of trust would increase after a semester of teaching, as they experienced academics' care by having the academics walk them through the semester. Yet, the contact per se might not have been the most determinant factor in establishing trust. Rather, it was the everyday teacher-student contact pervasive in academics' care that contributed to cultivating trust.

*In a sincere and solemn tone, Olivia stressed the following, "Trust is very important ..... The establishment of trust is two-way. It is important for teachers to show their trust in students as a way of caring. At the same time, students will feel it and be more willing to show their trust in teachers ..... Trust (between teachers and students) is of the utmost importance."*

*Ruth expressed the following, "More communication can build up the trust in academics' care. I think if you feel like interacting (with the academics), there must be trust in it. If you don't have trust in the professor, you don't want to talk to him/her."*

Communication was the beginning and outcome of academics' care built on trust. Teacher-student interactions provided opportunities for the academics and students to get to know each other. As such, the degree of trust increased after the students were taught by the caring academics for the whole semester. Class and consultation contact

was important ways to show academics' care and hence establish trust. Non-verbal communication, that is, the academics' attitudes, also played a noted role in determining whether the students experienced academics' care, and hence whether they contributed to cultivating trust. The students experienced academics' care when the academics delivered subject content in a passionate way, showed caring attitudes towards them, were concerned about whether they understood the subject knowledge, displayed empathetic, patient and willing-to-help attitudes to answer their questions and so forth. This also applied to consultations. The students observed project consultations to see whether the academics displayed welcoming attitudes and were sincere and willing to help them, rather than seeing them as a burden or an extra workload. If these caring attitudes were affirmed, this significantly contributed to the establishment of trust. On the contrary, if communication conveyed the impression that the faculty members were merely fulfilling their teaching duties, trust was not established. For example, the informants indicated that they would not approach a particular faculty member if he/she did not demonstrate in the first place that he/she cared about teaching the subject from the heart. All of this seemingly ordinary and insignificant contact was in fact pervasive in academics' care and contributed to the cultivation of trust. Thus, everyday communication and contact contributed to getting to know the academics, gradually building up students' trust and bonding in caring teacher-student relationships.

James depicted the heartfelt engagement in a trusted teacher-student relationship as follows, *"When there is trust (in a relationship), only after that will there be talks, and then comes the relationship. We feel like friends having deep chats, and you won't mind my asking (questions). This is called opening your heart. Only after that will there be sharing."*

The type of communication pervasive in academics' care contributed to building up trust and in turn a caring and bonded teacher-student relationship with deepened trust and feelings of security. When the students first met with the academics and experienced "Pedagogical Care", they were still more reserved and akin to "Observers". They

observed the academics while experiencing care during everyday caring encounters, looking for clues and evidence of the academics' passion and devotion to teaching and genuine care. The clues were demonstrated in the academics' attitudes, their willingness and efforts to help them, their customized responses and advice and so forth. The academics' "Pedagogical Care" gradually made them feel at ease, assured and secure, cultivated a trusted and caring teacher-student relationship, and hence fostered a caring atmosphere congenial to learning. This reflected the importance of communication in changing the students' perceptions of the faculty as aloof teachers who did not care about them and overcoming the psychological barriers that made them reluctant to seek help. Only after the dialectical cultivation of academics' care and trust could the students cross the threshold and seek consultations from the caring academics about non-academic issues and challenges in their prospective careers and adult life. In contrast, they did not feel comfortable seeking consultations from strangers, including counsellors from the university. Thus, the type of communication pervasive in academics' care served as a virtuous cycle generating more communication and deepening trust between the academics and students. This also contributed to moving academics' care from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" along the continuum of care.

### ***Passion and Caring from the Heart***

Passion and caring from the heart have been identified as the quintessential qualities of academics' care. Good teaching skills were also considered important, given that learning was the primary aim of students coming to university. Good teaching practices could not be compromised. Nevertheless, having good teaching techniques alone was not equivalent to academics' care. When asked about how to distinguish the caring academics from those teachers with good teaching skills, the informants almost unanimously expressed that academics' care was driven by the caring academics' passion and genuine caring from the heart. These two quintessential qualities served as the

criteria for distinguishing academics' care and discerning the subtle nuances of the caring academics who cared about the students from those good teachers who merely taught their subjects well only. The caring academics were considered those who were committed to doing more than teaching obligations and responsibilities entailed, instead of just performing the specified teaching tasks. This was necessary to relate the conceptions of academics' care to its relational construct and motivational drive.

James expressed the following, *"The higher the academics' motivational drive, the more profoundly the students will feel the support. As such, the students will learn more, and the outcomes will be greater and more effective."*

As James succinctly put it, academics' care was driven by their concerns about the students' learning and development rather than simply the fulfillment of their job descriptions. Thus, the quintessential qualities of passion and caring from the heart were pervasive in academics' care.

Passion was considered as a quintessential quality of academics' care. It was the key factor driving the academics to care about the students. The informants believed that the more intense the passion of the academics, the more committed they were and the more efforts they made to care about and do something extra for the students.

Mandy indicated the following, *"(The passionate academic) gives feedback on the applicability of students' sharing of examples, or uses another example to elaborate on their examples. The students feel that the academic listens to them seriously and pays serious thought to their opinions. 'Passion' is a good word to summarize this."*

The caring academics put additional time and efforts into doing something extra to teach the subjects well and were committed to assuming responsibility for the students' learning and development. For example, the academics' efforts put into thinking more



and different interesting and customized teaching methods, being well preparing for classes, using many interesting, practical and real-life examples, sharing their own experiences, initiating many interactions with the students in class, being very patient and meticulous in elucidating concepts and especially challenging concepts, encouraging the students to ask questions, replying to the students' emails and enquiries in a timely fashion, following up on questions, and providing feedback were considered as driven by their passion. Thus, passion was considered as the fuel to enthuse academics' care.

Caring from the heart was another quintessential quality of academics' care. The academics' genuineness was reflected in their passion for caring about the students, their sincerity and honesty in developing relationships with the students and their earnestness and trustworthiness in helping the students.

*Isabella expressed the following, "When I encounter difficulties, the academics' genuineness in giving me advice from the heart makes me feel their passion. Then, when I handle my own problems, my attitudes are more positive. Honestly, I already truly feel the support generated by their genuineness. The academic must not speak in a phoney tone or give hypocritical advice."*

Caring from the heart was also reflected in how the informants depicted academics' care. The informants typically mentioned one Chinese character, "Heart" (心), when asked about the quality of academics' care. The character "Heart" (心) was used in combination with different characters to form phrasal words and expressions in Chinese to depict the qualities of academics' care. All of these expressions were related to "Heart", including "Concern" (關心), "From the bottom of the heart" (真心) and "Dedication" (用心). This reflected the importance of caring from the heart as emanated from the academics' passion. The students thought that only the caring academics, who were driven by passion, were motivated to spend additional time and efforts on doing extra things for them from the heart. Thus, passion and caring from the heart were identified as the two quintessential qualities of academics' care.

## **Empathy**

Empathy as an essential attitudinal quality of academics' care required more than being learner-centred when addressing students' learning and emotional needs. The informants considered it important for the academics to step into their shoes, look into the issues from their perspective, and understand their feelings rather than seeing the issues solely from the academics' professional frame of mind.

*Sophie expressed the following, "Considering we are not as knowledgeable as (the academics), we may not be able to understand everything at once. We learn those concepts the first time. (The academics should) explain more and ask us, 'Is there anything that you don't understand?' Perhaps they should arrange a consultation time. Some students dare not ask questions in class. (A consultation time) could give them opportunities to ask questions after class." Sophie went on to elaborate, "(The academics) should think from the student's perspectives, such as whether the students understand or not, what the students' characters are like and what the students feel and are thinking about when they approach the academics to ask questions. (The academics) should think more from the students' standpoints."*

The informants relied on the academics to learn subject matter. They indicated that they felt frustrated when they could not understand the conceptual knowledge or figure out how to solve the problems encountered in doing assignments. As such, if the faculty, who were professionals and very experienced, thought only from their own frame of mind, they might not have understood why the seemingly simple and insignificant matters were of a major concern to the students. The academics had to be empathetic when the students asked questions, as being stranded in the predicament of failing to understand the subject matter or solve problems put them in a frustrated and distressed state. The informants expected the academics to think from the students' perspectives, such as why a certain intricate concept was so difficult to comprehend, rather than adopting an arrogant and haughty attitude towards their apparently simple questions. The students

thus experienced academics' care when the academics showed empathy, humility and patience.

Esther recalled an exemplary case of academics' care to illustrate the importance of empathy, *"(The academic) even called one of our group mates and asked, 'How's your team's progress?' That's a very good attitude that leaves me with a good impression. Honestly, for ordinary teachers, (their attitudes are like) 'If you don't submit the report, it's none of my business, I'll just deduct the grade!' But the caring academic does attempt to understand our difficulties and concerns about the project assignments. I think that's very good."*

In addition, being responsive to the students' enquiries and customizing their responses offered the academics ways to show empathy and hence academics' care. Empathy was expressed in arranging consultation appointments and allowing the students to seek consultations without appointments to suit their tight schedules, paying individualized attention to their needs and enquiries, providing high-quality customized answers by thinking seriously from their perspectives and so forth. Replying to the students' emails instantaneously or during non-office hours also provided ways to show empathy, as doing so allowed the academics to step into the students' shoes to understand the uneasiness and anxiety they experienced while waiting for replies. Thus, empathy was an essential attitudinal quality in manifesting academics' care.

Empathy also represented the total ownership of students' problems and emotional concerns. It called for the academics to step into the shoes of the students, to think from their perspectives and to understand their needs, predicaments and feelings. By owning the students' problems, being sensitive to their emotions and understanding their concerns and frustrations, the academics were expected and able to be humble and to show patience in answering their questions and addressing their concerns. Thus, academics' care required the academics to not only be learner-centred, but also genuinely care about the students as a whole, including their feelings, emotional needs and well-

being. Academics' care was thus pervasive in everyday contact and manifested in unpretentious and down-to-earth ways through empathy, humility and patience. Empathy was identified as the essential attitudinal quality of academics' care.

### ***Recognition and Respect***

Apart from empathy, recognition and respect have been identified as essential attitudinal qualities of academics' care. In this case, the academics were expected to value each student as an important and distinctive individual and hence show them recognition and respect, rather than homogenizing them as faceless masses or see them as a pile of work. This has also implied that genuine academics' care was expected to make the students more of a priority than the academics' research or other work.

Mandy stressed the following, *"It's not just about educating the students. The academics have to treat the students with passion. The academics need to value their students as important persons, not see them as a pile of work."*

Customizing advice was a way to show that the academics cared about and recognized each student as a respectable individual with distinctive character, backgrounds and problems. They took the initiative in identifying each student's individualized learning needs, patiently listening to his/her concerns, finding out his/her learning progress, and providing customized advice and guidance to address his/her unique needs.

Olivia recalled an exemplary case of academics' care related to an academic's customized advice on placement, *"(The academic and I) have developed a close relationship since the placement. For example, we had a face-to-face meeting before the placement. (The academic) asked me about which areas I would like to develop and commented on my suitability for those job areas. During the placement, (the academic) visited my placement company and asked me questions like, 'How's the job?' After*

*the placement, (the academic) had an appointment (with me) and asked me, 'What have you gained from the placement?'"*

Isabella reminisced about an experience of academics' care during her placement, *"I feel that the academic really thinks of personalized advice for me ..... He/she took the initiative to call me one day to offer customized advice (to address the placement problems encountered) ..... He/she then followed up with those problems ..... (During the placement) he/she sent an email to ask me if all of the problems had been addressed ..... (Some academics) pass their personal contact information to us so that we can contact them directly when we encounter any problems. That's a kind of personal caring."*

Customizing responses and advice was thus a way to show academics' care. More importantly, it revealed that the academics were not homogenizing the students or seeing them as faceless masses in an indifferent way.

Amelia poetically expressed the dampening feelings of being treated as part of a faceless mass in contrast to the primacy of teachers recognizing and remembering the students' names as ways of expressing academics' care, *"You feel that you are one of the masses. The feeling's awful. In other words, you feel like you are faceless, without eyes, ears or nose, just sitting there, like a monolithic statue. But the problem is you are not. Everyone has unique characteristics. And if we are made obscure by you, it appears that you are not respecting us as human beings."*

The frustrated and upset undertone was pervasive in Amelia's words. To drown each distinctive student in a faceless ocean of anonymity was to deny his/her individuality. It de-personalized the students, who felt neither respected nor recognized. This has implied the importance of academics' care in enhancing students' well-being through its contribution to recognizing and respecting each as a distinguished individual. Recognition and respect were thus identified as essential attitudinal qualities.

The informants experienced the academics' recognition and respect and hence academics' care in unpretentious ways. For example, the academics took the initiative in greeting the students, remembering and addressing them by their names, and remembering their backgrounds and anecdotes about them after having taught them for a semester. These were unassuming but significant ways to show recognition and respect to the students.

*Sophie expressed the following, "From what I have observed, one faculty member can really remember the students and call almost every student by his/her name. I think he/she has focused on me. He/she does not just read out from the lecture notes or forget about me after class. As such, (I feel that) I have an effect on the academic's heart. This makes me pay even more attention to his/her class and pay even more attention to him/her."*

Remembering students' names, the programme in which they have studied and their backgrounds was seen as an unpretentious but important and heart-warming way of expressing academics' care. It was concrete proof that an academic has focused his/her attention on the students and kept them in his/her heart. On the contrary, if the faculty member did not remember his/her students' names, he/she was perceived as obviously uncaring towards the students. Thus, the simple and seemingly trivial matter of remembering the students' names was in fact considered vital to students' experiences with academics' care.

Praising each student's distinctiveness and achievements was also considered an important part of receiving recognition and respect and hence experiencing academics' care. The students felt exhilarated for being recognized personally for their achievements.

*Amelia recalled an exemplary case of academics' care, for she felt that the academic genuinely kept her in his/her heart. When Amelia received an award on the Dean's list, she received personalized congratulatory words from the caring academic. Amelia reminisced about it in a jovial tone, "(The academic's) congratulations are genuinely from the heart. This is already heart-warming because (the academic) still remembers me, still*

*remembers that I got promoted from a higher diploma course (to a bachelor's programme)."*

Amelia's jubilant remarks about the caring academic remembering her as a distinctive individual were in sharp contrast to her frustration and desolate feelings over being treated like a homogenized student in an ocean of anonymity. Her anecdotes offered concrete evidence of the primacy of recognition and respect, and the implied importance of the academics' genuinely caring about the students as distinctive individuals by keeping the students as the focus of attention and in the academics' hearts. Thus, being recognized and respected as distinguished persons were significant ways for the students to experience academics' care.

Joey recalled experiencing academics' care during an award ceremony, when a caring academic remembered her and expressed customized congratulatory words to show recognition and appreciation. This served as a great motivation for Joey to study even more diligently and achieve even higher goals. Joey gratefully expressed, *"That's the first time that I received the Dean's list award. The caring academic said to me, 'I must see you again in this ceremony in the next semester.' Some very simple, unpretentious words will definitely make you feel that someone recognizes you. Someone will feel happy because of your achievements. Someone wants to see you make progress. This is a great motivation. This makes me want to see him/her again at the award ceremony."*

The students experienced academics' care through the academics' recognition and synchronized happiness. They were deeply impressed and touched that the caring academics felt happy when they saw the students reach achievements and make progress. The academics' synchronized happiness made them feel overwhelmed with joy and happiness and well cared for. This in turn served as a profound inspiration to work even harder, be more self-motivated and become more committed to studying and achieving higher goals. The motivational effects of academics' care were also corroborated by the caring academics' heartfelt words of encouragement, positive reinforcement, unwavering support, psychological comfort and compliments, which lifted up the students' spirits

when they faced frustrations. These effects were in sharp contrast to Amelia's profound remarks on being lost in an ocean of facelessness and anonymity. The profound effects of recognition on the students' contentment shed light on the far-reaching and positive implications of academics' care for the affective aspects of learning and well-being.

### ***Positive Attitudes***

The students experienced academics' care through the academics' positive and friendly attitudes. This included the academics' efforts to welcome and encourage the students to participate in discussions and seek consultations, proactively identify their needs and provide customized advice to help them address those needs. The academics answered the students' questions in a kind-hearted, patient and serious way and displayed an unwavering commitment to helping and mentoring them from beginning to end and even into the prospective future. They exhibited friendly attitudes towards building up caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships. In these ways, the students experienced academics' care.

The academics' friendly attitude was an especially sought-after quality of academics' care. It was more than a gesture; it reflected the academics' unpretentious and sincere way of interacting with the students. Although the teacher-student interactions, which were informal and friendly, might not have been totally equalitarian or hierarchy-free in the Chinese context, the students expected that the hierarchy was downplayed in such interactions.

Mandy expressed the following, *"Kindness and friendliness. Kindness means having a kind and loving heart. It is only because of this that the academics take the initiative to approach and encourage you. It's because of their eager-to-help attitudes. Friendliness means knowing how to communicate with the students. These are very important."*



Friendliness contributed to making the students feel comfortable with approaching and seeking advice from the academics. This might provide clues about the students' mentions of the importance of establishing friendships, or having friendly, less hierarchical relations with the academics. Although opinions among the informants were divided as to whether the academics and students could be friends on equal terms, they did expect and agree that heartfelt teacher-student interactions in an egalitarian and informal manner under a non-threatening atmosphere helped them get rid of their feelings of aloofness and withdrawal.

*Ruth shared the following, "I feel the warm and welcoming attitudes when I seek consultations. Some professors express their happiness when they see you come (to seek consultations); the style is very free. When I ask questions, I don't feel the pressure. I had planned to ask just a couple of questions (related to the subject). Then, I started to ask more and more (questions about different aspects). I think this is quite good."*

This representative quotation demonstrated the importance of cultivating a caring, friendly, supportive and non-threatening learning ethos through academics' care. Coupled with the cardinal quality of trust, friendliness contributed to building up caring, trusting and bonded teacher-student relationships and cultivating a caring, friendly and congenial atmosphere. This reflected the importance of a caring and trusted relationship and a comfortable and pressure-free context for students to explore deep knowledge, seek advice on different aspects of life and thrive in their development. This was created not from a vacuum, but through academics' care.

Empathy, recognition, respect and positive attitudes have been identified as the essential attitudinal qualities of academics' care. In this case, these identified qualities distinguished academics' care from being just learner-centred by manifesting academics' genuine care and showing recognition and respect for students rather than homogenizing them as faceless masses. These qualities were built on the academics' passion and care

from the heart for the students. These quintessential qualities of academics' care, which were subsumed under the cardinal quality of trust, contributed to distinguishing academics' care from their good teaching skills. Considered as a central construct in any genuine relationship, trust dialectically contributed to engendering and reinforcing academics' care. Having explored the informants' conceptions of the qualities of care, the perceived effects of academics' care on their learning, development and well-being are discussed in the following section.

#### **4.3.2. Perceived Effects of Academics' Care on Learning, Development and Well-being**

##### ***Learning***

Although opinions were divided as to the importance of academic results, the informants perceived that academics' care exerted positive effects on their learning. This has implied the pedagogical significance of academics' care for students' study.

It was not unusual for Amelia to obtain good academic results, as she was an intelligent and diligent student. When asked about the perceived effects of academics' care on her learning, Amelia expressed that she did not figure out why, but did obtain good academic results due to academics' care. Amelia reminisced about the experience, *"My subject grades show ..... when I perceive that the academics are caring and leave me a more positive impression, I get As in those subjects."*

Joey emphasized the following, *"For academics' care, I think the most important role is to give you the motivation to achieve even more."*

Academics' care was perceived to exert positive effects on students' study. This began with the classroom atmosphere, which appealed to the students and engaged them in learning. They saw academics' care and the way it helped them focus in class as a "straightforward causal effect". Having experienced academics' care, they wanted to

show appreciation for and gratitude towards the academics who were driven by their passion and taught from the heart. As such, they felt obliged to pay attention to the caring academics' lectures. Furthermore, academics' care created a caring atmosphere that contributed to rallying the students' attention and focus in class. Their attention not only included attentively listening to the academics' lecturing, but also extended to their initiative in engaging in activities and interactions and answering questions during the lectures.

Sophie expressed the following, *"From what I have observed, one faculty member can really remember the students and call almost every student by his/her name. I think he/she has focused on me. He/she does not just read out from the lecture notes or forget about me after class. As such, (I feel that) I have an effect on the academic's heart. This makes me pay even more attention to his/her class and pay even more attention to him/her."*

Isabella expressed her upbeat spirit in anticipating the caring academic's forthcoming lectures, *"The academic is very caring, and we have interactions in class. This makes the overall class atmosphere very good and makes us look forward to next week's lecture. The academic has left us with a very good impression. The two to three hours of interactions (in the lectures) make me feel good."*

Isabella indicated the following, *"When we attend class and feel that the professors are very caring and very genuine, our degree of attentiveness increases. For examples, when the professor asks questions, we take the initiative to answer (the questions) ..... Perhaps (the students' responses) reflect whether the professor genuinely cares (about the students) or not. This has in turn reflected our respect for the professor."*

In addition, academics' care was perceived to exert positive effects on stimulating students' interest in learning and knowledge exploration. The academics' caring attitudes and behaviour made the students feel more comfortable with asking questions about the subjects, enquiring about relevant prospective career development and so forth. As such, the academics' "Pedagogical Care" increased the informants' interest in the subject, and

hence learning more about the relevant subject matter, and even encouraged them to contemplate developing careers in their respective fields. This could be attributed to the contributions of academics' care to cultivating caring, closer and trusted teacher-student relationships and a caring learning context for enthusing, engaging and facilitating students to learn.

Sophie expressed the following, *"I feel that the distance (between the academic and the student) is shortened. I won't feel so afraid of the academic. I will dare to ask him/her questions."*

Isabella shared the following, *"If the academics treat me with more care during the learning process, I will become more interested in the subjects and will take the initiative to explore the academic problems. When we do projects and feel that the professor is caring, we become bolder and take the initiative to approach him/her to ask, 'We have come up with an innovative idea. What do you think? Is it appropriate for our project?' In other words, (academics' care) will increase our interest and initiative, and the relationships with the professors will be better."*

James reminisced about an exemplary case of academics' care related to organizing extra voluntary tutorial classes, *"The academic was very nice. He/she did something extra beyond his/her job description. He/she was willing to spend his/her personal time on helping the students. The extra tutorial classes were voluntary. I felt, and every student felt, very surprised. I saw a lot of students become interested in the subject because of this, because of those extra classes. The academic really spent his/her personal time on genuinely helping the students from the heart. He/she truly wanted the students to fully understand the knowledge."* Although James did not participate in those extra classes, he did show much appreciation for the academics doing something extra beyond their job descriptions and genuinely from the heart.

Academics' care was thus perceived to shorten the distance between the academics and students and help students overcome feelings of alienation. The students' fear of asking questions could be attributed to the Chinese cultural influences; the students in general

were relatively passive in voicing opinions or asking questions. Despite this, some of the informants were dampened by their undesirable experiences with the faculty's non-welcoming and insincere attitude, either not responding to their questions very well or answering them in a sloppy way. In contrast, academics' care was able to engender feelings of being well cared for in the students. This contributed to cultivating caring, closer and trusted teacher-student relationships and a caring atmosphere to put the students at ease. It facilitated them to ask more questions and take more initiative in learning. It also encouraged them to engage in intellectual debates with the academics. This exerted positive effects on the development of students' critical thinking, which was considered as important in university study.

James emphasized the values of higher education as follows, *"It's no longer spoon-feeding or cramming in university, unlike in primary or secondary school. You no longer expect the teachers to tell you what is correct and accept it without doubt. In university, there are many approaches to doing a project or an assignment. You no longer just check it according to the marking scheme. This is critical thinking, broadening the minds."* James went on to stress the important role of academics' care in developing critical thinking and made reference to the mind-stimulating intellectual debates with caring academics, *"(The contributions of academics' care are) really its insight, its facilitation of the cognitive aspect and its integration of knowledge into the minds. A conversation will make your eyes open, stimulate your thoughts."*

James' perceptive and insightful remarks were telling. They stressed the pivotal role of academics' care in synthesizing the affective and cognitive of learning and as such facilitating cognitive development, which included integrating knowledge, understanding new concepts and gaining insights into one's thoughts. This substantiated the crucial role of academics' care and its positive effects on the development of students' critical thinking, which was considered important in higher education.

Academics' care also exerted positive effects on students' study motivation, especially in times of difficulty. It was seen as a source of motivation to inspire and drive the students to be more committed to and perseverant in studying when facing frustrations. The essential quality of recognition in academics' care exerted profound effects on motivating and encouraging the students to study diligently and not give up in the face of challenges. The informants thus used good academic results as concrete means to reciprocate the academics' care and efforts in teaching and never giving up on them. As such, their determination to show reciprocity to the academics by achieving a high GPA served as a strong motivator for them to study hard.

Amelia explained in an upbeat and vigorous tone how academics' care acted as an effective motivational drive, *"When I encounter a very caring academic who teaches me a subject, and when the academic is being very nice to me, I think that I have to get an A. The feeling is, I want to use my academic results to reciprocate and express gratitude to the academic and show him/her that I fully understand what he/she has taught me. I will show it to (the caring academic)."*

Sophie expressed the following, *"When the academic cares about you very much, the attitudes are totally different. I am no longer studying for myself. I don't want to let the academic feel disappointed. I feel that the academic has expectations of me and has a passion (to teach). I don't want to waste the academic's heart (heartfelt efforts). I will give full efforts to studying, learning everything the academic has taught and ask the academic questions to make sure that I understand (the subject matter) and learn even more in order to do better. I do these things to avoid disappointing the academic. I think these are the positive effects of academics' care."*

Mandy recalled an experience of academics' care, *"The academic took the initiative to call our project team in after office hours and asked, 'How's your project?' I felt very surprised. It's really hard to find an academic to take care of work after office hours. Just a few simple questions, 'How's your progress?' 'Do you need help?' 'Is there anything that you don't understand?' He/she did not literally complete the project for us, but did give us lot of encouragement. (This made me) feel really good ..... When*

*we are overwhelmed with the torment of doing project assignments, there are some who come and say, 'Pull it through!' I feel so happy."*

Mandy also stressed the importance of academics' care in helping her positively cope with difficulties and motivating her to study, *"I look for academics' care, because this is one of my study motivations ..... When I encounter difficulties in studying, or when I feel unhappy during my studies, or because of poor examination results, there is someone (the caring academic) who helps you, motivates you and supports you. Then, you won't fall so hard and hurt so badly."*

Academics' care thus made a difference in the students' attitudes towards their studies. The informants experienced academics' care as a result of the academics' expression of genuine concerns for their studies and feelings of happiness for their achievements. As such, the students felt touched, inspired and motivated to study more diligently and achieve higher goals. They did not want to waste the academics' "heart" and efforts. They saw that studying and getting good academic results were no longer worthwhile for their own sake, but concrete means to reciprocate and return favours to the academics. They were considered solid proof that the students had learned and mastered all of the knowledge taught by the academics. Hence, the academics' heartfelt efforts were not wasted. The students showed their deep gratitude towards the academics to avoid disappointing them. In sum, the contributions of academics' care to cultivating caring, closer and trusted teacher-student relationships and creating a caring and congenial learning context exerted positive effects on students' attitudes, commitment and motivation to study.

### ***Development***

Learning about disciplinary knowledge was only one facet of the students' development. Some informants candidly indicated the perceived effects and meanings of academics' care related to helping them obtain a high GPA. The other informants considered this

remark shallow. They thought university was not just a place for learning textbook knowledge, but more importantly a place for developing their critical thinking, broadening their views and achieving prospective careers and holistic development.

James elaborated on the important role of academics' care in facilitating students' exploration of future prospects, *"It's talking about my long-term career prospect, what my life direction should be. Even if you get a 4.0 GPA, it doesn't mean that you know what you want to do in the future, or whether you can develop a career in your area of interest. These are something beyond the subject knowledge. But, to me, these are even much more important."*

Mia shared an exemplary case of academics' care in which the academic was caring and passionate about teaching the subject and sharing many examples related to the subject matter; as such, the academics' care stimulated her interest in developing her career in that particular area, *"From having zero knowledge to having an interest in developing my career in that particular area, (the effects of academics' care) extended beyond the knowledge realm to my prospective development."*

Despite the disagreement, the perceived effects and meanings of academics' care on improving students' academic results were telling in relation to the students' prospective development. Obtaining a high GPA was seen as an important means of increasing one's probability of getting a good job. Thus, obtaining good results, developing critical thinking and so forth had far-reaching implications for the students' prospects. In particular, these effects were manifested in the contributions of academics' care to role modelling.

Role modelling has been recognized as important in grooming students' holistic development. For example, they modelled the academics' people skills in terms of how to tactically handle thorny people issues and were expected to be applicable to the students' prospective workplaces. These skills were seen as important for students in surviving and prospering in their prospective careers. Experiencing academics' care



became the catalyst for them to model their behaviour on the caring academics, and inspired them to become the kinds of persons they wanted to be in the future.

Eva stated the following, *“Academics’ care is not just purely for academic pursuit. It can be of great help to students. The caring academics’ inspiration, thoughts and attitudes will inspire the students in terms of what to do and how we see the teachers. My teachers are probably the kinds of people that I want to become in the future.”*

Olivia thoughtfully explained the importance of role models as follows, *“Every academic has something worth (students’) learning. This will make me trust him/her. First, there are some things that (I) will appreciate about him/her. I will then trust him/her, learn from him/her and then imitate him/her ..... Apart from parents, teachers are the second type of senior people I trust among the senior. We have a higher degree of trust in teachers. No matter whether it is our study or personal growth, teachers play a very important role, that of role models. It’s good to model ourselves on teachers. It’s been like this since we were young. After entering university, I also came to see the academics as role models. We imitate them subconsciously and follow their (behaviour). (We think that) they are probably right. Why not listen to their advice?”*

Joey stated the following, *“If an academic is very phoney, I don’t think I can learn from and follow this person. I can’t trust this person. The academics are very important. They take on the role of role model.”*

Having experienced academics’ care, the students gradually built up trust in the academics and adopted their caring behavior by caring about others. Academics’ care contributed to immersing them in the experiences of being cared for and cultivating a caring and trusted teacher-student relationship. This enabled them to get to know the academics and gradually appreciate their qualities and behaviour. These were considered as prerequisites for them to see the academics as role models. The dialectical reinforcement of academics’ care and trust also served as catalysts for the students to model themselves on the caring academics. They were unaware of “imitating” the

academics' caring acts, but later found out that they were in fact following the caring academics' behaviour. This has implied the far-reaching effects of academics' care on their holistic development into caring people who cared for others and engaged in a virtuous cycle of care. This was reflected in the informants' admission that they were willing to help the academics in the future as a way of showing them gratitude and reciprocal care. This might have also been a concrete manifestation of the students' modelling themselves on the academics' caring qualities and behaviour. Role modelling was not a process of becoming a passive, uni-directional recipient of knowledge from the academics, but an active learner-initiated development process. Thus, academics' care helped the students transition from teacher-initiated learning to learner-initiated role modelling. In sum, academics' care contributed to influencing students' holistic development through role modelling.

### ***Well-being***

Academics' care was perceived as exerting positive effects on addressing students' emotions and hence promoting their well-being. This was related to the informants' observation that they would study happily when they felt cared for. Amelia experienced feelings of elation when she was taught by a caring academic and obtained very good results.

Amelia stressed the importance of having a caring academic to an enjoyable study experience. Amelia emphasized this point by asking a rhetorical question in an excited and high-pitched tone, *"Studying happily is of course important. Why isn't it important? Why isn't studying happily important?"*

Amelia, who was a brilliant student, addressed the rhetorical question by making a wise and unpretentious remark, *"In your pursuit of a 4.0 (GPA), you can share and study happily to achieve the 4.0 or struggle painfully to*

*get the 4.0. To me, happiness is a very important thing. Studying should be a happy process. Like my mother says, 'If one studies too hard, one may commit suicide.' Because if you can't get what you want, it will be heart-rending! What's the point of being so stressed and so worried?"*

Likewise, Amelia explicated in an upbeat and vigorous tone how academics' care acted as an effective motivational drive, *"When I encounter a very caring academic who teaches me a subject, and when the academic is being so nice to me, I think that I have to get an A. The feeling is, I want to use my academic results to reciprocate and show my gratitude to the academic and show him/her that I fully understand what he/she has taught me. I will show it to the caring academic."*

Amelia's sharing was telling. Having been immersed in and impressed by academics' care during their study, the students felt appreciated for and obliged towards the academics. They were motivated to study diligently and use their good academic results as a way to show gratitude to the caring academics. Academics' care thus served as a motivational drive to encourage and engage the students to study diligently. More importantly, academics' care generated positive ways of coping with study challenges, the students channelled their feelings of being cared for into study motivation. This might have far-reaching implications for facilitating students' holistic growth into caring persons and promoting their positive coping with challenges and enhancing their well-being. The informants' words are quoted once again as follows to show the multifarious and profound effects of academics' care on the students' well-being and other aspects.

Isabella expressed the following, *"When I encounter difficulties, the academics' genuineness in giving me advice from the heart makes me feel their passion. Then, when I handle my own problems, my attitudes are more positive. Honestly, I already truly feel the support generated by their genuineness. The academic must not speak in a phoney tone or give hypocritical advice."*

Sophie expressed the following candidly, *"Care will make the learning attitudes totally different. No matter what kinds of problems I face, I need*

*someone to support me, someone to care about me. My attitudes will be more positive. I have to learn independence in university. But in a way, (we) need support and help from others."*

Mandy also stressed the importance of academics' care in helping her positively cope with difficulties and motivating her to study, *"I look for academics' care, because this is one of my study motivations ..... When I encounter difficulties in studying, or when I feel unhappy during my studies, or because of poor examination results, there is someone (the caring academic) who helps you, motivates you and supports you. Then, you won't fall so hard and hurt so badly."*

Likewise, Joey recollected the motivating effects of academics' care on her studies and its uplifting effects on her emotional state, *"When you feel unhappy about studying or feel very stressed, the caring academics chat with you. This makes you feel motivated to study more diligently, and you won't feel devastated anymore."*

Academics' care has contributed to fostering positive attitudes and coping skills in the face of difficulties. The students felt well cared for and supported after experiencing academics' care. This probably encouraged them to embrace positive outlook and engage in desirable behaviour while also helping them address their negative emotions and get rid of their undesirable attitudes and habits.

Mandy expressed the following in a gentle, pleasant and assured voice, *"The exchange of hearts (心靈上的交流) is very important to students. Qualitatively speaking, this can change the students' negative thoughts and change their behaviour. It has profound effects on the students' prospective future."*

It was the heartfelt and heart-warming exchange on the emotional plane, or as the informants put it the "Exchange of Hearts", after experiencing academics' care that made a difference in the students' well-being. This contributed to turning their negative thoughts and undesirable behavior in a more positive direction in the face of adversity

during their learning and development. Academics' care was thus perceived to exert positive effects on the students' well-being. The importance of academics' care in promoting the students' well-being was mirrored by their feelings of frustration and hurt due to a perceived lack of care.

*Olivia shared her perceptions of the lack of care as follows, "If the students take the initiative to ask questions and seek help, the teacher still appears unwilling to respond or even reprimands them. This greatly dampens the students' level of confidence. They will think, 'Am I failing to learn it because I have low capability?' or, '(Am I) so stupid that I can't even learn such a simple thing?' If the teacher reprimands the students, the learning atmosphere won't be good. If the learning atmosphere is good, the teacher will teach the students how to do it after their failed attempts and (after their) feelings of unhappiness ..... (If the teacher) keeps saying something very negative to the students, this will make them feel really bad."*

The students perceived their feelings of being cared for and the support they received after experiencing academics' care as buffers against their frustrated and vulnerable feelings in the face of difficulties. Thus, the significance of academics' care serving as a safe haven and a secure base for the students and hence its effects on promoting their well-being were reflected.

*Amelia shared her heartfelt experience with the perceived lack of care as follows, "When I face those academics who have negative attitudes, (my feelings are) 'I can) study well and achieve it without you!' So, in a way, it's rather wicked, but there is no way ..... When I encounter a very caring academic and get an A, (I think), 'I got an A! It's GREAT!' Then, when I face a not very-caring academic and get an A, (I think), 'An A. Okay, it's an A, so what?' My feeling of happiness diminishes by half. This psychological state is not very healthy. There is no way. If you want to pursue a (high) GPA, you have to study no matter what. Therefore, you have to channel your grievances into motivation."*

Amelia's experience was once again telling. The informants' sharing drew attention to the positive effects of affective aspect of learning on the students' study and well-being. Nevertheless, the students studied diligently regardless of whether they experienced academics' care, as good academic results were seen as important to secure a promising career in the future. However, they perceived that lacking the expected academics' care would probably have adverse effects on their emotions and psychological states. This probably led them to struggle with grievances or other negative emotions. The negative attitudes, feelings and emotions were definitely detrimental to them and had absolute adverse effects on their well-being. This was reflected in the sharp contrast to their previous depictions of having positive emotions and states of mind when studying diligently, pursuing positive coping mechanism and so forth as they experienced academics' care. A lack of academics' care might have led them to harbour negative emotions when dealing with difficulties and challenges, exerted dampening effects on their confidence and positive attitudes and hence negatively affected their well-being. If they were subject to prolonged negative states of mind or emotions, the perceived damaging effects on their well-being would have been serious. Thus, the effects of academics' care on students' well-being could not be overestimated.

In sum, academics' care served as a motivational drive to engage students in studying and holistic development and as a buffer against the frustrations they faced in everyday life to promote their well-being. As discussed previously, the informants did not feel comfortable with sharing their problems and difficulties with their parents, friends or university counsellors. This underlined the important role of the academics in caring about and supporting the students. It also reinforced the overarching themes of "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" in academics' care to buffer against the vicissitudes of life through the effects of experiencing care, building up caring, trusted and sustainable bonds between students and academics, creating a caring and congenial learning context, and offering a safe haven and a secure base with a long-term orientation for students. The goal was not to fall into the trap of therapeutic discourse, but to envisage the

potential positive effects of implementing caring pedagogy on the enhancement of students' well-being. The meanings of academics' care were also questioned. These meanings are discussed in the following section.

#### **4.3.3. Safety Net and Sustainable Bonding as Meanings of Academics' Care**

Academics' care was conceptualized as a "Safety Net" and a form of "Sustainable Bonding", representing its quintessential meanings. Nevertheless, academics' care was not the panacea for good teaching. The students perceived good teachers as those with excellent teaching skills, which they considered important. Their answers intrigued me. Then, I deliberately asked them a contrasting question as framed by binary opposition and made them choose between the opposing answers. I asked the informants whether they preferred having a caring academic with mediocre teaching skills, or an academic with good teaching skills but not caring at all. This was a framed question; because academics with good teaching skills do care about the students. Otherwise, they will not care for well preparing all the teaching materials and striving for teaching the students well. Considering this, teacher care will be more like expressing in a degree of intensity in the real world, rather than in either caring about the students or not. Therefore, the question was deliberately asked to provoke their deep thoughts, tap into their subconscious minds and uncover their true beliefs and candid views.

The students admitted that they would opt for academics with good teaching skills. They made it clear that caring academics who lacked good teaching skills could not supersede those with strong teaching skills. They were goal-oriented towards learning and mastering subject matter, as they considered it important in equipping themselves with the know-how necessary for prospective career development. This was the reason they came to university to study. Having a good teacher with excellent teaching skills was important to them. Academics' care could not supersede good teaching skills. In

particular, when faced with challenging and difficult subjects, the students had definite affirmative responses to opting for teachers with excellent teaching skills.

Amelia expressed the following, *"If the subject is challenging, of course I will choose the academic who teaches well."*

Joey was adamant and spoke in a business-like tone, *"I'll pick the academic (with excellent teaching skills). At the end of the day, I'm a result-oriented person. If he/she teaches you well, then you can learn (the knowledge). You come to university to study, because you want to learn."*

Esther replied as follows, *"Pick the academic with better teaching skills. I don't care too much what he/she is like (for example, a mean person). Perhaps I have already made self-adjustments. If he/she makes just a couple of (mean) remarks, I won't keep them in my heart."*

These replies were intriguing and drew attention to the meanings of academics' care. They begged a question, *"If there was no academics' care, would students learn and grow?"* To present a fair view of academics' care, the answer was affirmative, *"Yes, students would learn and grow even if they experienced no academics' care."* This was reflected in the informants' confirmatory replies that they studied diligently to obtain good academic results for prospective career development, regardless of whether they met with caring academics, and experienced academics' care. What, then, were the meanings of academics' care? The informants were asked about whether academics' care was meaningless to them.

Amelia rebutted the proposition that academics' care was meaningless. Amelia, who was an intelligent student, elucidated the following, *"On the contrary, I think the academic who only teaches well has no great meaning to me. In my view, if you teach well, you will only teach the concepts. But in most of the cases, I can understand the concepts all by myself. Then, why do I need the teacher? The reason is based on the premise that I do not have the confidence to fully understand the (challenging) concepts."*



*That's why I choose the academics with excellent teaching skills over the caring academics. In other words, in most cases, I'll choose a caring academic."*

*Amelia used an interesting metaphor to illustrate the meanings of academics' care, "The feeling of security! It's just like 'Dating'. When dating, it isn't about choosing the perfect one. It's about choosing the one you have great affection for. This applies to choosing an academic. In other words, choose the one who is nice, or who you have a good relationship with. Then, it will be happier. Choosing the perfect one is of no use."*

When faced with choosing an easy subject or having caring academics with excellent teaching skills, the students were most likely to choose the caring academics. Although the informants admitted academics' care could not supersede good teaching skills, they affirmed that academics' care was meaningful and significant to them. They believed there was something that could not be gained from those faculty members who had good teaching skills but were not very caring.

Nevertheless, Mia appeared to hold the contrasting view that having a caring academic made only a slight difference. Mia believed that studying at university was dependent only on one's own efforts. To reconcile the contrasting views between Mia and the other informants, it was necessary to look at Mia's assumption, which was predicated on encountering no problem during her university studies.

*James expressed the following, "For academics' care, when I want to study and when I encounter difficulties, whether I can find a means, whether there is someone to help me or guide me to solve the problems, that's most important." James went on to explain that "Academics' care is the linkage. The focus should be on whether the academics have helped the students ..... No matter how brilliant the students are, they have problems."*

Esther expressed the following, *“When I don’t encounter any problem, I don’t need to approach the academics. Perhaps, to me, academics’ care is unpretentious. When I face a problem and I don’t know what to do, when I approach the academic, he/she will answer me. That’s very important.”*

Mia offered the following remark, *“I don’t care about whether (the academic) likes to make friends with me. If I need help, you do help me. And that’s fine.”*

Mia’s apparently contrasting view was addressed by the overarching theme of academic’s care being a “Safety Net”. The meanings and significance of academics’ care became apparent and explicit in times of need. Whenever the students were in need, they expected that they could rely on the caring academics as a source of help, support and guidance. When they faced difficulties, academics’ care as expressed in taking the initiative in offering help, showing directions and suggesting ethical ways of handling the predicaments was considered to be of utmost importance. They might not have been totally aware of the presence of academics’ care in the everyday teaching context as expressed in “Pedagogical Care”, or when the problems encountered were simple and hence addressable by the students themselves. There might have been no need for **them** to approach the academics to seek advice. As such, academics’ care might have appeared to have no special meaning to the students. However, academics’ care was most deeply felt and experienced when the students were in need of help in their studies or facing critical situations.

Isabella shared the following, *“University study is a very important stage. We’re 20 years old, we have mature thoughts. But we feel worried about looking for prospective work ..... The academics have richer life experience and various work experiences and can give us advice. When we feel anxious and can’t think of a correct way to solve the problems, we may go astray and make a wrong choice. This may have grave effects on our future prospects ..... When I feel most confused and really don’t know what to do, the academics give me a hand. Then, if I don’t know what to do, the*

*academics will prompt me with some positive suggestions. After that, I have the courage to go ahead."*

Mandy expressed the following, *"Because university life has such a wide variety of vibrant choices, students can choose different things. If the academics can give advice and instill the correct thoughts, in addition to advising us on our studies, this's very important."*

When the students felt confused, the academics pointed out the right directions and guided them to find the correct paths through their concerns and customized advice as driven by their genuine care. This might have also made the students feel connected and attached to the academics, rather than being drowned in an overwhelming, alienating and faceless university system. Academics' care engendered a feeling of bonding on the personal level and a sense of belonging to the university.

Sophie expressed the following, *"We have developed a sense of belonging to the school. It's just like when you travel to a place and engender a sense of belonging to that place. It is not because of how beautiful the place is; it is because of the interactions you have with the people. The academics have great effects on our university life, not only academically. If we have good interactions and good relationships with them, we miss them and don't want to part with them."*

The meanings of academics' care were also expressed in terms of engendering students' sense of belonging to the institute, rather than being drowned in the alienating university system. This was important because the feelings of connection and attachment to the academics, whom the students knew about, provided them with feelings of felt security and a secure base to return to seek help and guidance whenever they were in need. This was not only limited to the students' present, but also extended to their prospective future via a sustainable bonding with the caring academics. It was reinforced by the informants' adamant expressions that they did not want to share private matters with or seek help from a stranger. Thus, this has implied meanings of academics' care in building

up a sustainable bonding with the academics, a sense of belonging with the institute and as such a safe haven and a secure base for the students.

In view of this, the meanings of academics' care served as a bridge to the future for the students. The significance of academics' care was also attached to obtaining good academic results and developing critical minds. University was considered an important life stage and the last formal learning stage to prepare and groom the students to embark on their prospective careers. As such, university study was seen as the link to the workplace, and university a society in miniature. The informants perceived that university study was not only about equipping them with knowledge, but also developing their critical minds, helping them gain insights into prospective careers and achieving holistic growth. This further corroborated the meanings and significance of "Sustainable Bonding" to academics' care.

James emphasized the roles of academics' care in addition to its benefits for academic results as follows, *"Every student faces one's own problems. Thus, I really need someone to share their experiences with me, to guide me, because I haven't been to the next stage yet. I need an experienced person to tell me what the prospective path is and how I should prepare for the next stage."*

Therefore, the meanings of academics' care were helping groom the students to go through the rite of passage. The caring academics were expected to shepherd and facilitate the students during this learning and socialization process in their university studies. They prepared the students to embark on their careers and cope with anticipated challenges in adult life upon graduation. In terms of its facilitation role, the meanings of academics' care were connecting the students to their prospective futures by serving as a "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" for them to seek advice and guidance. The meanings of academics' care were thus expressed as a bridge to the future.

In sum, the meanings and significance of academics' care were conceptualized as serving as a "Safety Net" for the students to use whenever they were in need of help and the "Sustainable Bonding" they established with the academics. This was made salient when they faced challenges and encountered difficulties in their study and life. As such, academics' care was seen as a safe haven and a secure base. The "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" were thus identified as overarching themes in the discussions of academics' care and represented its quintessential meanings.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1. An Overview of the Discussion**

An analytical exposition of the research findings drawn from a group of Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in relation to their conceptions and experiences of academics' care is presented in this chapter. Analysis is corroborated by a framework of the relevant literature related to ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory. Integrated analysis of the domains with emergent themes from the first five research questions provides insights into the last research question, "What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?". This addresses the third purpose of this thesis, "To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and development in Hong Kong". Figure 5 illustrates the domains with emergent themes in addressing the implications of caring pedagogy.

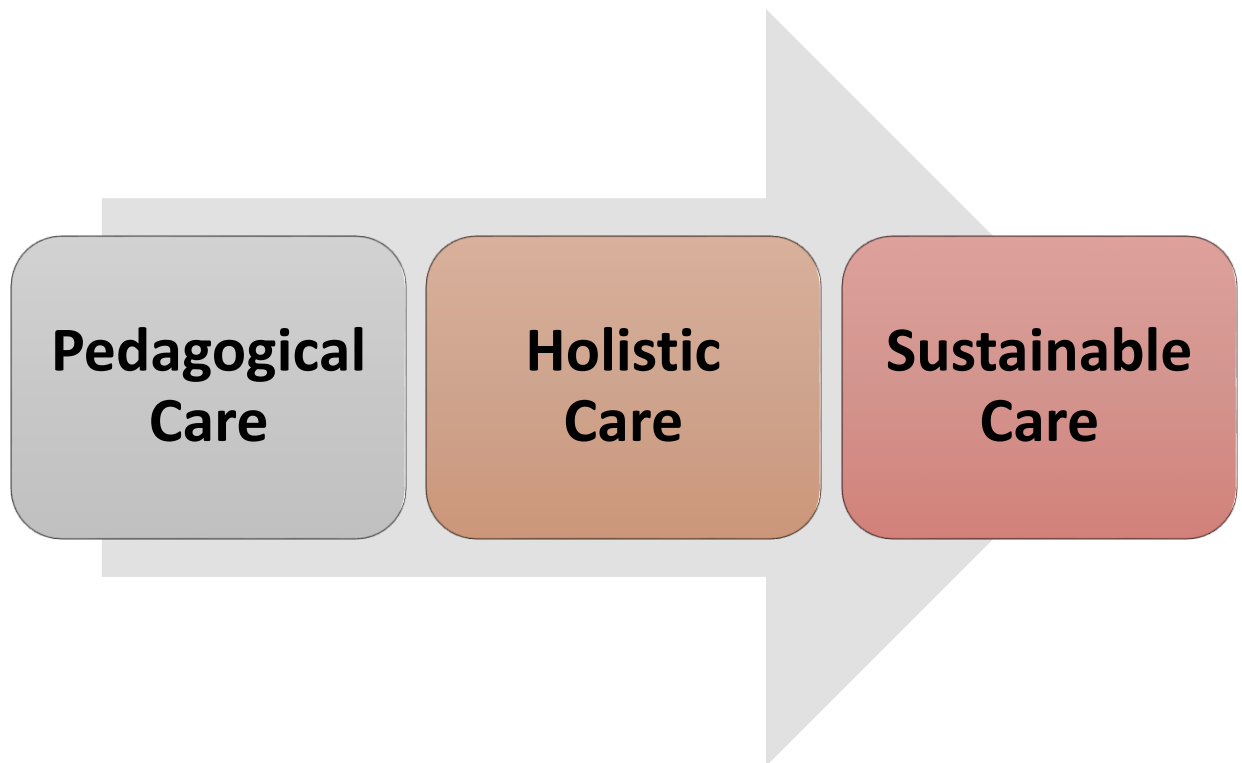
**Figure 5. Chart of Domains with Emergent Themes in Addressing the Implications of Caring Pedagogy**

A continuum of academics' care moving along from pedagogical care, to holistic care, and to sustainable care	Pedagogical care, holistic care as a safety net, and sustainable care as in reciprocal care with long-term orientation	Essential qualities as engendered by the cardinal quality of trust	Perceived effects of academics' care on learning, development and well-being	Safety net and sustainable bonding as quintessential meanings of academics' care
<b>Res. Ques. 1:</b> How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?	<b>Res. Ques. 2:</b> How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?	<b>Res. Ques. 3:</b> What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?	<b>Res. Ques. 4:</b> What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?	<b>Res. Ques. 5:</b> What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Res. Ques. 6:</b> <i>What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>A Continuum of Academics' Care</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Pedagogical Care and Study Motivation</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Holistic Care, Safety Net and Autonomous Growth</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Sustainable Care and Virtuous Cycle of Care</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Academics' Care and Well-being</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Significance of Academics' Care in Chinese Cultural Context</b></li> <li>▪ <b>A Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education Context</b></li> </ul>				

## 5.2. Conceptual Framework of a Continuum of Academics' Care

The conceptual framework of this study, which comprised a continuum of academics' care, was built on synthesized discussions of ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory and its influences on students' learning, holistic development and well-being. Figure 6 presents the schematic diagram for the proposed conceptual framework of a continuum of academics' care within the higher education context.

**Figure 6: Schematic Diagram for the Conceptual Framework of a Continuum of Academics' Care**



In contrast to the care in pre-school and school settings, academics' care in a university context was conceptualized as a continuum of care, moving along the continuum from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care". The "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" were identified as the dual overarching themes of academics' care. The "Safety Net" emphasized providing a safe haven and a secure base in addition to help and mentorship to students as they developed agency, autonomy and maturity while negotiating academics' care. The students did not want or expect academics' care to be a microscopic or spoon-feeding kind of care, but actively negotiated and reconstructed it to be a "Safety Net" to which they could return to seek support, help and guidance whenever they were in need. They expected the caring academics to assume the facilitator and mentor roles, and thereby advise and groom their learning and holistic



development. As such, academics' care in the university context was different from the kind of care in other school settings in terms of the students' autonomy and agency to mediate and negotiate with caring academics through both parties' deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity.

The negotiation of caring relationships, behaviour and boundaries went hand in hand with the deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity of care between students and academics. The deepening of responsiveness, reciprocity and commitment was also embodied in the students' expectations of maintaining "Sustainable Bonding" with the caring academics and expressing reciprocal care with a long-term orientation. The students expected to reciprocate care, extend help and return favours to the caring academics over the long term. As such, academics' care was conceptualized as moving along the continuum of care with deepened reciprocity and a two-way directional flow of care. Academics' care involved more than simply being learner-centred, maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship or one-way flow of care or being ephemeral and terminable at the end of the semester. Academics' care was more akin to what Buber (1965) described as the firmament enclosing teacher and student. Yet, Buber's (1965) depiction focused more on present teacher-student interactions, rather than clearly discussing prospective interactions that extended into the future. Though Buber (1965) underlined the importance of trust in teacher-student relationship, he did not further elaborate on relationship- and trust-building between students and teachers in terms of its ongoing, dynamic negotiation of relational boundaries. This thesis has thus addressed the limited literature on students' active agency role in continuously negotiating and reconstructing the dynamic and flexible boundaries of caring relationships and behaviour with teachers. This study also corroborated Mayeroff's (1971) view that care was an action-oriented process that facilitated the growth of the cared-for. Likewise, Mayeroff's (1971) discussion was more general, instead of specifically discussing the prospects of sustainable caring relationships. Thus, "Sustainable Bonding" as expressed in reciprocal

care with a long-term orientation differentiated academics' care in the university context from teacher care in other school settings.

Literature related to ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory provided frameworks for looking into the role of academics' care. Yet, each of the concepts discussed on its own failed to explain how these three domains were interrelated through the thread of academic's care and fell short of addressing the subtle and dialectic roles of academics' care in moving along the continuum of care, included how the deepened mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity in the experiences of care facilitated students' learning and development. Although Vygotsky's approach addressed the importance of teacher-student interactions to the facilitation of students' learning in a mediated social context, it fell short of addressing the attachment bonding beyond the classroom context, which was important for university students to engage in independent learning and exploration. Adult attachment theory filled this gap. Adult attachment theory addressed the centrality of care-giving as a safe haven and a secure base for students to explore knowledge and return to seek support and guidance whenever they were in need. However, it fell short of addressing how the actual bonding was created through everyday teacher-student contact in a particular setting. Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning was brought forward to address the importance of affect in building up teacher-student relationships in a mediated social context. Focusing on Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning or adult attachment theory on its own overlooked the centrality of care. Care played a central role in cultivating a caring and supportive academic-student relationship, establishing a caring and inclusive social context and creating a feeling of security and bonding, and hence in interrelating affective aspects of learning and building up attachment bonding. As such, academics' care exerted positive effects in terms of addressing students' emotional needs and promoting their well-being. To capture the informants' subtle and nuanced conceptions of academics' care as a continuum of enriching caring experiences, this study synthesized discussions of ethical care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory and explored

the implications of caring pedagogy. The pedagogical implications of academics' care are discussed in the following sections.

#### **5.2.1. Pedagogical Care and Study Motivation**

At one end of the continuum of academics' care, "Pedagogical Care" was conceptualized as the academics' pedagogical commitment. Although caring contact might not have been as obvious in "Pedagogical Care" as it was in "Holistic Care" and "Sustainable Care", academics' care was embodied in the academics' internalization of the students' study concerns and problems, in addition to their recognition and respect for the students as distinctive individuals. This exerted perceived positive effects on the students' motivation to study. Academics' care was also discerned as serving as a "Safety Net" in providing academic support to students to ensure they understood the subject matter and coped with their studies.

"Pedagogical Care" was distinguished by the caring academics' internalization of the students' concerns and problems. The students' expectations that the academics would teach the subjects well were not simply results of the superficial gratification of obtaining a high GPA. They saw good academic results as a way to facilitate their future career development. Education has long been considered as a legitimate means of gaining upward social mobility in Chinese societies (Bond, 1991; Stevenson and Lee, 1996). This may explain why the students studied diligently to obtain high academic results. Academics' care conceptualized as pedagogical commitment carried the implicit meaning that the academics cared about the students' future development. In view of the value the students placed on their prospective career development, they experienced academics' care when the academics internalized (owned) their study problems and cared about their studies. This aligned with Kim's (2007) discussion of the one-caring's internalizing the goals of the cared-for as his/her concerns. It also related to the core

constructs of ethical care, including motivational displacement and responsiveness (Noddings, 1984; Goldstein, 1999; Kim, 2007). The caring academics were motivated to internalize the students' concerns and own their study problems. As such, they were committed to devising customized pedagogical practices in response to the students' needs. This ensured that the students understood the subject matter and that their concerns about their studies and prospective career development were addressed. It involved not only a learner-centred pedagogical design, but also a holistic and "motivationally-displaced" concern about the students. Thus, the pedagogical commitment, which encompassed the academics' internalization of students' study concerns and problems, was the distinctive construct of "Pedagogical Care".

The affective aspect of learning was then tapped into when the academics internalized the students' study concerns through academics' care, and this exerted perceived positive transformative effects on the students' study motivation and academic performance. The students experienced academics' care through the academics' heartfelt concerns about their studies and feelings of happiness for their achievements. As a result, they felt really touched, inspired and motivated to study more diligently and achieve higher goals. This reflected the noted effects of the experiences of academics' care on students' attitudes and orientations towards studying. The informants emphasized that they did not want to waste the caring academics' efforts and "heart" after experiencing academics' care. Therefore, they saw studying as something no longer done for their own good, and considered achieving good results as concrete proof that they had learned and mastered all of the knowledge taught by the caring academics. They considered achieving good academic results as a means to reciprocate with and avoid disappointing the caring academics. Hence, the caring academics' heartfelt efforts were not wasted. Studies have found that the Chinese are collectivist and motivated by group interests and goals for the benefit of in-group members, including familial members, relatives and close friends (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Hofstede et al., 2010). The shift in the students' motivational orientation from focusing on the self and in-group members to extending their focus to

include the caring academics was telling. First, it has implied that the students were gradually looking at the caring academics as in-group members. The far-reaching implications of caring academics becoming in-group members for students' attachment are discussed in the following sections. Second, as the Chinese are motivated by group interests and goals, seeing the caring academics as in-group members and using good results as a means of reciprocating the caring academics might have served as a strong motivational drive for the students to study diligently and hence obtain higher academic results. Thus, academics' care was perceived as having positive effects on students' study motivation and academic performance.

The academics' recognition and respect for the students was another distinguished construct under "Pedagogical Care". This aligned with Thayer-Bacon and Bacon's (1996) discussion of college students' depictions of caring teachers as willing to attend to them and treat them as valued members of their learning situation. Respect was identified as a key quality in teacher care (Goodman and Goodman, 1990). This thesis has shown that students placed high value on recognition and respect as essential qualities of academics' care. The primacy of recognition and respect was mirrored in the informants' frustrations and hurt feelings at being homogenized as faceless masses. To reiterate, Amelia's moving remark on the feelings of being neglected is once again presented as follows.

Amelia poetically expressed the dampening feelings of being treated as part of a faceless mass in contrast to the primacy of teachers recognizing and remembering the students' names as ways of expressing academics' care, *"You feel that you are one of the masses. The feeling's awful. In other words, you feel like you are faceless, without eyes, ears or nose, just sitting there, like a monolithic statue. But the problem is you are not. Everyone has unique characteristics. And if we are made obscure by you, it appears that you are not respecting us as human beings."*

Recognition and respect were emphasized as essential qualities of academics' care, which exerted perceived positive effects on the students' study motivation. Academics' care

was expressed as recognition and respect for each student as a distinctive individual, and hence involved customizing academics' responses to address the students' unique needs. The academics' recognition, which they exhibited by remembering the students' names and praising their achievements truly made the students experience academics' care. Being recognized as distinct individuals served as a strong motivational drive for the students to study more diligently and achieve higher academic performance. Thus, the motivating effects of academics' care could not be overestimated.

The essential qualities of recognition and respect in academics' care might have also contributed to helping the at-risk students. The empirical data showed that if the caring academics took the initiative in remembering the students' names, recognizing and respecting them as distinctive individuals, internalizing their concerns, providing customized responses and recognizing their achievements in their distinct areas, this might have exerted positive effects on motivating them to study diligently, cope with their problems positively and gain their trust to further help them address additional issues in both the academic and non-academic realms. As such, this shed light on the potential positive effects of academics' care on helping at-risk students. This proposition was corroborated by previous studies of how at-risk students experienced positive, transformative changes in their study attitudes and habits and coping strategies after meeting teachers who really cared about them despite untenable circumstances (Phelan et al., 1992; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Garza, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Research conducted in different cultural contexts in relation to the transformative effects of caring teachers has shown similar results (Barber, 2002) and substantiated the far-reaching effects of academics' care on helping at-risk students in the university context. Integrating care into pedagogy not only addressed the marginalization of care in higher education, but also unveiled a viable means for helping at-risk students through the motivating effects of academics' care.

However, the empirical data showed that the students' conceptions of academics' care were influenced by their socialization that they associated the caring behaviour with the expected social roles and obligations of teachers to protect students, rather than universal morality. This was in contrast to Noddings' (1984) discussion of ethical care, predicated on the moral undertone and the pursuit of moral ideal self. In the Chinese context, the senior assumes the role obligations to protect the junior, as shaped by *Wu Lun* (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). According to the students' conceptions of teachers' role obligations and expectations, they expected the caring academics to not only fulfil their fundamental responsibility to teach the subject well, but also be committed to protecting them and offering a refuge that would help them cope with their studies and gradually other problems. This has revealed the students' conceptions of caring academics as those who were dedicated to doing more than the teaching duties and responsibilities entailed, rather than just do their jobs. This might have led them to conceptualize the caring academics' roles as that of not only teacher, but also "Safety Net" providing support to them in different aspects of their studies and lives. Thus, the overarching theme of conceptualizing academics' care as a "Safety Net" emerged.

The important contributions of academics' care to the facilitation of students' learning lied in its dialectical, twofold effects on building up a caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationship and cultivating a caring ethos brimming with felt security, like a "Safety Net". The caring relationships and ethos and the established trust intrinsic to both contributed to motivating and facilitating the students to engage in more discussions and mind-stimulating intellectual debates with the caring academics so as to learn and explore more knowledge. The students' insights into the subject matter were then polished, their views were broadened and their critical minds were developed. According to Goldstein's (1999) discussion, what mattered in the learning process was not the subjects that induced critical thinking, but the means by which the subject matter was taught and how the students were facilitated to learn. Buber (1965) and Confucian teaching (Shim, 2008) underlined the importance of dialogue in the co-construction of

knowledge. Accorded to Tompkins (1996), students release their initiatives, creativity and dedication only when they know they can express themselves freely. This might have underlined the significance of academics' care and its contributions to cultivating a caring teacher-student relationship and a caring and felt-secure ethos that helped students thrive in their cognitive and creative development and knowledge exploration. This was in alignment with Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of the inseparability of the affective and cognitive aspects of learning and the importance of a socially mediated learning environment. The empirical data corroborated the significant dialectical influences of care and affect in engaging, motivating and facilitating students' study in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999; Johnson-Farmer and Frenn, 2009). The significant dialectical influences of care and affect on the facilitation of students' learning have been recognized.

#### **5.2.2. Holistic Care, Safety Net and Autonomous Growth**

The caring and trusted relationships as cultivated by "Pedagogical Care" contributed to deepening mutual engagement, responsiveness and reciprocity and as such moved care along the continuum of academics' care to "Holistic Care". Trust as dialectically cultivated by academics' care was the cardinal quality for students to overcome their psychological hurdles to seek help from the academics on non-academic matters. After the students' crossed their threshold of sceptic attitudes towards the academics, they could feel the psychological comfort and security established by trust, which was dialectically established by the academics' care. They then responded to the academics with a deeper engagement in their teacher-student relationships, as reflected in their initiative in seeking advice on different aspects of their lives, included personal and career matters. This was reflected in the academics and students' increasing mutual engagement and reciprocity in their caring teacher-student relationships. The significant dialectical influences of academics' care and trust on the fostering of bonded teacher-student



relationships congenial to students' learning and development have been recognized. This might explain why academics' care was conceptualized as necessary to the beginning and continuity of caring teacher-student relationships. This study reinforced Noddings (1984) and Kim's (2007) advocacy that learning is conceptualized from a relational construct founded on care, rather than merely pedagogical concern.

In contrast to the subtle caring contact in "Pedagogical Care", "Holistic Care" was more discernible. Academics' care was conceptualized as necessary for students' holistic growth into independent, autonomous and mature adults. Academics' care was expressed in its facilitation role and gave the students an ample scope of latitude for their own trial and error along their paths of exploration and growth. It also served as a safe haven and a secure base to support and mentor the students whenever they were in need.

However, the students still held ambivalent attitudes towards academics' care. They expected to receive care and guidance from the academics when they felt perplexed, helpless, vulnerable and despondent due to problems with their study or when they felt overwhelmed by the anticipated challenges in their prospective careers and adult life. Yet, their "wanting" of academics' care was incongruent with their conceptions of university students as independent learners and problem solvers. This was aligned with a discussion presented by Clegg et al. (2006) that university students in the United Kingdom considered help seeking or admitting to failures when coping with difficulties as a failure or a loss of face due to the incongruities in their self-constructed university students' identities as independent and autonomous young adults. The informants strived to develop themselves from debutantes into full-fledged adults. They hesitated to consult the academics because they reasoned that they were grown up and should not bother them too much. They were aware that the academics adopted a laissez-faire approach to facilitate their development into mature adults. They admitted that they had to strike a balance between engaging in independent learning and seeking advice and care from the academics. They acknowledged that they had to grow up and assume the role of the

independent learner, rather than clinging on to academics' care. Yet, they still straddled the identities of student and grown-up. This might explain students' ambivalence towards wanting academics' care and their awareness that they should not "want" that care.

The ambivalent attitudes underlined the significant implications of the students' conceptions of academics' care as a "Safety Net". They sought academics' care when they were in need and expected it to come in the form of facilitation, rather than having the problems solved for them. As such, they did appreciate the caring academics who took the initiative in caring about them, giving them support, mentoring them and helping them positively cope with their issues. The caring and supportive ethos cultivated by the caring contact following the students' experiences with "Pedagogical Care" made them feel comfortable, eased their psychological stress in seeking help and hence addressed their ambivalent and embarrassed feelings. As discussed previously, help-seeking behaviour was considered dissonant with their identities as independent university students. The empirical data reinforced Warwick et al. (2008) and Hyland's (2010) discussions of the importance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic development and well-being. Studies have recognized the significance of cultivating a caring teacher-student relationship, its effects on creating a collaborative learning environment characterized by a caring ethos of warmth, pleasantness, friendliness, trustworthiness, responsiveness and felt security, and its contribution to students' learning, intellectual, social and emotional development and well-being (Noddings, 1984; Chan and Watkins, 1994; Goldstein, 1999; Lee, 2004). Thus, the caring academics had to take the students' ambivalent attitudes into consideration and as such take the initiative in creating a caring learning ethos through academics' care as expressed in the daily contact. They did so not to fall into the trap of therapeutic discourse, but to take a proactive approach to addressing students' ambivalent attitudes, embarrassed feelings

and predicaments and thereby facilitate their learning and holistic growth and promote their well-being.

This study rebutted the claims about the therapeutic discourse made by Ecclestone (2004) and Ecclestone et al. (2005). In contrast to the views of therapeutic discourse, the empirical data revealed that the students demonstrated autonomy, agency and maturity. Academics' care in the university context was no longer expected to be the spoon-feeding kind of care involving direct intervention, doing everything for students, holding their hands to mould them on rigidly replicating teachers' ways of completing the tasks and so forth. The students expected the academics to play the facilitator role and provide them with guidance on and insights into their issues, so that they could have clearer directions and thoughts on how to address the questions on their own. As in other agency relationships involved in caring work (Daly, 2002), the students were actively negotiating and reconstructing care with the academics, rather than assuming the part of a passive social agent. This contrasted with Tronto's (1993) discussion that the cared-for was a passive recipient of care who did not actively co-construct relationships or negotiate the actual caring work. This study also challenged Li and Du's (2013) findings that Chinese students tended to conform to teachers' direction and guidance in the school context. Fine's (2007) emphasis on the agency roles helped clarify the students' active negotiation and reconstruction of academics' care with the caring academics. This was aligned with discussions presented by Clegg et al. (2006) and Beard et al. (2007) on undergraduate students being active, independent and autonomous social agents appropriating different resources to cope with problems by themselves, rather than being objectified and becoming overly dependent on therapeutic counselling. Thus, this thesis refuted the claims made about therapeutic discourse in the university context.

The key construct of autonomous growth in "Holistic Care" was further revealed in the students' conceptions of academics' care as a "Safety Net" embodied in the academics' facilitation role. Facilitation was differentiated from the laissez-faire approach. The

facilitator was conceptualized as one watched over the students from a distance and gave them direction and guidance to prevent them from falling. This was revealed in the informants' uses of metaphors to depict academics' care as "Learning to ride a bicycle" and an "Invisible hand" guiding them without domineering or interfering with their own pace and path of learning. These metaphors were substantiated by previous findings that teachers were able to facilitate students to become autonomous and independent learners when they provided the necessary and appropriate direction, guidance and mediation in response to learners' development stages (Hedegaard, 1990; Moll, 1990). Likewise, Confucian teaching emphasized teachers' facilitator role in individualizing teaching methods in response to students' characters and needs, coaching them to cope with learning challenges and engaging in friendly dialogues (Shim, 2008). Confucian teachers were expected to engage in long-term reciprocal learning relationships with students to co-construct knowledge and cultivate character (ibid.). Thus, academics' care played a significant role in facilitating students to explore their paths of learning and achieve holistic growth.

University study offered a rite of passage for the students to develop into mature adults and cope with problems independently and professionally. Conceptualizing academics' care as a "Safety Net" carried the implication that the academics were expected to help the students explore freely on their own learning paths and achieve holistic development. As such, the caring academics served as a safe haven and a secure base to which the students could return to seek guidance and emotional support whenever they were in need. This was corroborated by the discussions of adult attachment theory. Academics' care was expressed to give the students ample scope of freedom and latitude for their own pursuits, attempts and failures along the path of growth. It assured them that the caring academics were always there to support, guide and mentor them whenever they were in need, with the goals of helping the students and serving as a secure base for them to thrive in their exploration and development. Thus, academics' care, serving as the "Safety Net", contributed to facilitating students' autonomous growth and developing

them into independent and mature adults with critical minds, rational thoughts and logical reasoning skills.

The “Safety Net” as exemplified in the metaphors of the facilitator role also reflected the importance of the feelings of felt security and psychological comfort among the informants as a result of experiencing academics’ care. This was substantiated by the discussions of adult attachment theory. As depicted in the metaphors of “Learning to ride a bicycle” and the “Invisible hand”, the facilitator was expected to remain by the students’ sides to watch over them as they took and eventually finished their journeys. The academics’ genuine care for the students, as shown in their unwavering support and the extra efforts and time they committed to helping and mentoring the students, contributed to bonding both parties in caring teacher-student relationships and engendering feelings of felt security and trust. This led the students to gradually soften their watchful attitudes towards the academics, put down their guards against them and start to take the initiative in seeking advice from the academics on non-academic matters. This resulted in the students experiencing a deepening of the academics’ care and attachment bonding to the caring academics. As such, the embodiment of academics’ care in the “Safety Net” as depicted in the metaphors contributed to creating a caring, trusted and felt-secure bonding between the students and caring academics, echoing Buber’s (1965) discussion of the firmament encompassing teacher and student. Thus, academics’ care gave the students the felt-secure feelings and assurance that the caring academics were always there to support, help and mentor them whenever they were in need during their self-exploration of knowledge and life. This might further explain why the students conceptualized academics’ care as the starting point for a caring teacher-student relationship and its outcomes. It was necessary to bring forward discussions of the dialectical influences of care, affect and attachment to gain insights into the relational construct of academics’ care.

Goldstein's (1999) discussions of ethical care and Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning provided frameworks for looking at the role of care in creating a caring and socially mediated context in which learning can take place. However, Goldstein's (1999) discussion failed to address the dialectical role of care and affect in building up a secure base for students to thrive in their explorations and holistic growth. Academics' care played a part in cultivating caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships, fostering feelings of felt security and psychological comfort, and hence gradually elevating the caring academics to become significant others and resources and a safe haven and a secure base to which the students could return to seek refuge and advice whenever they were in need of help during their explorations and development. Adult attachment theory then furnished a conceptual framework for exploring the role of academics' care in cultivating a safe haven and a secure base for students to explore knowledge and return to whenever they faced adversity. Nevertheless, neither adult attachment theory nor Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning alone was able to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the subtlety and dialectical influences of academics' care, affect and attachment in facilitating students' learning and promoting their well-being.

The felt-secure and well-assured feelings generated in an affective learning environment as fostered by academics' care contributed significantly to students' self-exploration along the path of learning and holistic growth. These were aligned with discussions of the importance of adult attachment to affective aspects of learning, particularly those ensuring that an individual was confident that the attachment figure would be always available and responsive when needed and called upon; and as such the student would feel secure, become more independent and hence move away from the attached base for ever-increasing distances and durations to explore on his/her own (Bowlby, 1977; Feeney, 2004; Feeney and Collins, 2004). Thus, the felt-secure feelings of attachment played a critical role in university students' holistic growth, as learning at the university level was no longer confined to one-way classroom teaching, but involved a lot of student autonomy in terms of exploring, taking on challenges and making discoveries. If students'

tendency to explore was thwarted because they could not find a secure base on their path of exploration, this might have exerted grave effects and restricted their holistic growth. The findings not only substantiated the importance of adult attachment theory in university students' independent learning and knowledge exploration, but also corroborated the dialectical influences of care, trust, the affective aspect of learning and attachment bonding on facilitating students' learning and holistic growth. This study reinforced Hyland's (2010) proposition that education based only on cognition or affect was detrimental to students' holistic development. It also underlined the agency role of university students in their learning and development, which was aligned with Mayeroff's (1971) discussion of the one-caring's concerned for the holistic growth of the cared-for into an independent, autonomous and mature adult. The significance of academics' care in students' learning and holistic growth has been recognized.

### **5.2.3. Sustainable Care and Virtuous Cycle of Care**

Moving along the continuum of care, academics' care was conceptualized as "Sustainable Care" with a further deepening of mutuality, commitment, responsiveness and reciprocity from both the academics and students. The "Sustainable Bonding" embedded in "Sustainable Care" was likely to develop with the caring academics, but not just any teachers. The students' discussions of the nuances of differences between their relationships with good teachers and caring teachers were illuminating. Their descriptions of their relationships with academics who had good teaching skills but were not very caring were more transactional, task-oriented and study-related. They appreciated and valued those good teachers who were pragmatic and effectively transmitted the subject knowledge because of their strong teaching and communication skills and practical teaching approach. Yet, their appreciation was based more in knowledge, technique and skills. On the contrary, they depicted their relationships with caring academics as caring, affective, supportive, transformational, motivating,

inspirational and brimming with an implicit “Sustainable Bonding”. They valued and cherished the caring academics who genuinely cared about them and provided unwavering support whenever they returned to those caring academics to seek help and guidance. Hence, their appreciation was more people-oriented and focused more on their caring attitudes, characters and behaviour. More importantly, their relationships with the caring academics were action- and future-oriented. The students viewed their caring teacher-student relationships from a long-term perspective, and they were likely to sustain those caring relationships into their prospective futures transcending the semester time. Such relationships were also action-oriented, motivating and stimulating the students to embrace positive learning attitudes, study diligently, achieve higher academic goals, cope with difficulties and challenges positively, and as such be happier and enjoy a better well-being. They were also action-oriented in that they inspired and encouraged the students to care about the academics and other people and engage in a virtuous cycle of care. This was reflected in the distinct abilities of caring teacher-student relationships to build up “Sustainable Bonding” with the caring academics in the students’ experiences of “Sustainable Care”.

“Sustainable Care” was conceptualized as a buffer against the anticipated vicissitudes of adult life. It was also distinguished by the students’ deepened emotional commitment and reciprocal care to the academics with a long-term orientation. Rather than a one-way uni-directional flow of care from the academics to the students, it became a mutual, two-way flow of care between both parties. More importantly, rather than the simple acknowledgement of the care they received from the academics, the students showed care for the academics in return and vowed to reciprocate their care in the future. Thus, “Sustainable Care” might have led to the transfer of caring behaviour from the academics to the students, who then became the one-caring. This has implied that “Sustainable Care” might have entered academics’ care into a virtuous cycle of care, engaging the students to become the one-caring.



“Sustainable Bonding” was conceptualized as a key construct in “Sustainable Care” and served as a safeguard to ward off the vicissitudes of life in the students’ prospective futures. The students’ conceptions of academics’ care challenged Goldstein’s (1998) discussion of ephemeral relations as in “Teacherly Love”. The official in-class teacher-student contact was severed upon the end of the semester time. However, academics’ care, which the informants conceptualized as a relational construct with a long-term orientation, was transformed into everlasting caring teacher-student relationships and “Sustainable Bonding” extending to the future. This was substantiated by the long-term orientation of the Chinese towards relationships, in addition to their tendency to see social relationships and protection from their seniors as engendered parts of their structural social relations and buffers against the vicissitudes of life (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Hofstede et al., 2010). Academics’ care as “Sustainable Bonding” served as a safe haven and a secure base to which the students could return to when they faced challenges and adversity in their prospective career developments and explorations of life. This was supported by Noddings (1984) and Weinstein’s (1998) observations that ethical care was non-selectively presented to students whenever they sought teachers who transcended the boundaries of time. They stated ethical care involved a long-term, reciprocal, total encounter and inclusive commitment to reach out to others and expect their growth and enhancement (Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1998). Nevertheless, these discussions did not explain why ethical care was able to serve as a refuge extending to the future. Adult attachment theory provided a framework for exploring the role of academics’ care as a secure base. Nonetheless, the literature related to adult attachment theory in the educational context was limited in that it focused more on discussing adult learners’ current explorations of life. Discussions of the Chinese conception of social relationships with a long-term orientation and their expectations of protection and care from their seniors have corroborated the findings of this study. The students’ “Sustainable Bonding” with the caring academics served as a buffer against the vicissitudes of life and extended to their prospective futures.

Another major distinction of “Sustainable Care” was the reciprocal care the students expressed to the academics. Reciprocal care was not clearly addressed in the literature related to teacher care. The findings of this study showed that the students did not just acknowledge academics’ care by showing reciprocal attitudes towards the academics and completing the circle of care (Noddings, 1984). They also felt obliged to help the caring academics in concrete ways whenever the latter needed assistance, whether presently or in the future. Thus, the students’ conceptions of academics’ care transcended Noddings’ (1984) discussion of reciprocity in the cared-for’s acknowledgement of the one-caring’s caring work. The informants’ conceptions of academics’ care transcended its unidirectional flow from teachers to students. The tendency to reciprocate care and extend help to the caring academics was aligned with the features of adult attachment theory as expressed in the reciprocity between the one-caring and the cared-for (Hazan and Shaver, 1994). This reflected the students’ progression into adult attachment relationships and implied their growing maturity in assuming the role of one-caring. Moreover, as Chinese people value long-term relationships, the reciprocity as expressed in returning favours is not confined to the immediate present, but extended to the future and future generations (Bond, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010). This substantiated analysis that students conceptualized academics’ care as “Sustainable Care” with a long-term orientation towards reciprocal care that extended to their life upon graduation. Thus, this study synthesized the discussions of adult attachment theory and the long-term orientation of relationships and reciprocity in the Chinese cultural context.

This unexpected insight shed light on the distinctiveness of academics’ care in the university context along with its long-term orientation and reciprocal care when moving along the continuum towards the end to “Sustainable Care”. A caring teacher-student relationship founded on academics’ care transcended and withstood the test of time and was not limited by term time or official structural relations. With a continuous flow of care from the academics to students, reciprocal care was generated by academics’ care as expressed in the students’ eagerness to reciprocate care and extend their help to the

caring academics. Having been immersed in academics' care, the students, being the cared-for, were gradually socialized and assumed the role of one-caring. This was aligned with the observation that students were more likely to become caring persons after experiencing teacher care (Fjortoft, 2004; Larson, 2006). Fjortoft (2004) emphasized that transformative changes were effected due to the powerful influence of the affect on other peoples' lives, rather than the intellectual effects. This has implied that academics' care matured from unilateral to lateral (or even multilateral), from taking to giving (and especially reciprocating care to the caring academics) and from an inward-looking focus on one's own study concerns to an outward-looking focus on others' concerns (especially to the caring academics).

This reflected the latent influences of academics' care on developing students into caring persons who pass on care and hence engage in a virtuous cycle of caring about one another. The findings reinforced Tompkins (1996) and Hyland's (2010) advocacy that university education cultivated wholeness and was responsible for developing students holistically. Education was about not just teaching the mind, but more importantly educating the character. According to Neill (1960) and Thayer-Bacon and Bacon's (1996) view that teacher care was a central element in developing students as whole persons, the potential effects of academics' care on students' caring dispositions could not be overestimated. After experiencing academics' care, the students were socialized to become a wellspring for expressing and passing on care to others. The cardinal role of academics' care in facilitating students' holistic growth into caring persons and engaging them in a virtuous cycle of care deserved attention.

#### 5.2.4. Academics' Care and Well-being

Amelia's metaphor of "Subsistence (food) supplies in military operations" and Bowlby's (1988) discussion of the secure base are appropriate for exploring the meanings and significance of academics' care in promoting students' well-being.

Amelia explained the metaphor of "Subsistence (food) supplies in military operations" for academics' care as follows, *"(Academics' care) is like an unwavering back-up. It's just like we're fighting a battle at the front. If there's a caring academic, I will feel that he/she is managing the subsistence supplies at the back. I will never worry about the issue of subsistence supplies. However, if the academic is not caring, (I will fear that he/she) will set the fire to the subsistence supplies at any time. The feeling, the contrast is great. Because when I feel that, (I) am not sure whether he/she will back me at the rear. I feel helpless ..... Somehow, it's psychologically comforting. I may not need to 'use' the help available. But, you know, there's always someone there. He/she will offer help whenever I am in need."*

Amelia's metaphor was coincidentally almost a replicate of Bowlby's (1988) elaboration of the concept of the secure base.

*"In essence this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary. In these respects it is a role similar to that of the officer commanding a military base from which an expeditionary force sets out and to which it can retreat, should it meet with a setback. Much of the time the role of the base is waiting one but it is nonetheless vital for that. For it is only when the officer commanding the expeditionary force is confident his base is secure that he dare press forward and take risks"* (Bowlby, 1988, p.11)

Amelia's metaphor was telling. It shed light on the profound implications of academics' care for the promotion of students' well-being. The students' felt-secure and well-

assured feelings and psychological comfort were recognized as significant. They had experienced academics' care and knew that the academics were always there to offer help and support. They did not want the academics to help them in a microscopic way such as by spoon-feeding them, solving their problems for them, holding their hands to mould their acts in a way that would replicate teachers' ways and so forth. Yet, they did expect that whenever they encountered any problems and frustrations, no matter how far they had drifted away, they would be able to find the caring academics and return to them to obtain support and guidance immediately. It was not just getting the academics' assistance that mattered. In other words, the students might not have needed to seek help from the academics. What were most crucial to them were the feelings of felt security and assurance, they knew and were confident that the caring academics would always be there ready to provide them with guidance and support whenever they needed help. This was aligned with Feeney (2004) and Feeney and Collins' (2004) observations that safe havens dealt with alleviating distress and that good care-givers were able to effectively restore the feelings of felt security when needed by facilitating problem resolution. It was the students' feelings of felt security and psychological comfort after experiencing academics' care that made them certain the academics would always be there, like a "Safety Net" protecting them from falling and helping them. A caring, warm, nurturing, benevolent and empathetic teacher creates a safe haven, a secure base and a protective environment for students (Pistole, 1999). In this case, academics' care, conceptualized as a "Safety Net" served as a safe haven and a secure base to which students could return to seek help, support and guidance and to buffer against the vicissitudes of life. The feelings of felt security and assurance contributed significantly to engendering positive feelings among the students and promoting their well-being.

The significance of academics' care was noteworthy when Amelia related her metaphor of "Subsistence (food) supplies in military operations" to her previous moving remarks on the feelings of hurt and neglect she experienced as a member of a faceless homogenized mass. To drown each distinctive student in a faceless ocean of anonymity was to deny

their individuality. The students were depersonalized, neglected and felt disrespected and hence not cared for. This indicated the important contributions of academics' care to recognizing and respecting each student as a distinctive individual and as such engendering positive images of them and enhancing their well-being.

The primacy of academics' care serving as a "Safety Net" in promoting students' well-being was also mirrored in situations where the students could not obtain the help and care they expected. They felt very disappointed, hurt and helpless and lost interest in particular subjects and their trust in the faculty if the faculty members did not respond to their reasonable requests for help, which included questions about subject matter, clarifications of complicated concepts and so forth. The informants' feelings of vulnerability were reflected in their perception of academics' care as a "Bonus". In other words, academics' care was also seen as a gift from the faculty that could not be taken for granted, due in part to their identity as university students. They acknowledged that they had to learn their independence and become independent learners and problem solvers. Being independent was also considered congruent with their identity as university students. As such, their ambivalent attitudes towards help seeking made them even more vulnerable and feel even more embarrassed when their requests for help from the faculty were declined. Help seeking was dissonant with their identity as independent university students. Any decline in help further exacerbated the dissonance and rendered them feeling even more embarrassed, distressed and vulnerable. This reflected the students' feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability towards academics' care, as they could not be absolutely certain that the faculty members would help and care about them. These feelings were aggravated after the students experienced frustrating encounters with the more reserved faculty. The students thus were overwhelmed with feelings of vulnerability, were uncertain about whether the other academics would help them, and worse still lost trust in the faculty. The discouraging and disapproving experiences the students had while encountering the more reserved faculty members reflected the important contributions of academics' care to cultivating their feelings of felt security and

assurance and their psychological comfort. The feeling of freedom from uncertainty, vulnerability and fear also contributed to promoting their well-being.

The centrality of academics' care in enhancing students' well-being was unveiled when Amelia's remarks about the noted differences on emotional and psychological states were compared and contrasted, regardless of whether she had experienced academics' care.

Amelia explained in an upbeat and vigorous tone how academics' care acted as an effective motivational drive, *"When I encounter a very caring academic who teaches me a subject, and when the academic is being very nice to me, I think that I have to get an A. The feeling is, I want to use my academic results to reciprocate and express gratitude to the academic and show him/her that I fully understand what he/she has taught me. I will show it to (the caring academic)."*

Amelia shared her heartfelt experience with the perceived lack of care as follows, *"When I face those academics who have negative attitudes, (my feelings are) '(I can) study well and achieve it without you!' So, in a way, it's rather wicked, but there is no way ..... When I encounter a very caring academic and get an A, (I think), 'I got an A! It's GREAT!' Then, when I face a not very-caring academic and get an A, (I think), 'An A. Okay, it's an A, so what?' My feeling of happiness diminishes by half. This psychological state is not very healthy. There is no way. If you want to pursue a (high) GPA, you have to study no matter what. Therefore, you have to channel your grievances into motivation."*

The students' grievances, their feelings of being hurt and the negative emotions they harboured as a result of their feelings of not being cared-for were deeply moving. A perceived lack of academics' care made them feel deserted, discouraged them from seeking advice, dampened their attitudes towards learning and created negative emotions and thoughts such as grievances, hatred, withdrawn attitudes, negative coping approaches and psychological distress. This thwarted their learning, posed impediments to their growth and exerted negative effects on their well-being. This study was aligned with an observation made by Phelan et al. (1992) that teacher care contributed to helping

students address and reduce their negative emotions, such as feelings of alienation and desperation, which were detrimental to their studies. This was also corroborated by previous studies that revealed that undergraduate and postgraduate students experienced severe stress, held defeatist attitudes and had a tendency to withdraw when they felt alienated and not cared for by the faculty (Franklin et al., 2002; Brady and Allingham, 2007; Hawk and Lyons, 2008; Stephen et al., 2008). The informants were brilliant, diligent and responsible students with serious attitudes towards learning. Yet, their feelings of being rejected in learning situations and their perceived lack of care made them feel alienated, despondent and vulnerable. They felt rejected, deserted and left to struggle on their own, not to mention the pressure of coping with psychological anxieties and the emotional distress involved in having to bear their frustrations and failures alone. It was surmised that the detrimental effects on the at-risk students were even worse. This thesis thus reflected the central role of academics' care as a "Safety Net" to help students address their problems and emotional needs and hence promote their well-being.

In addition, the role of academics' care as a "Safety Net" had positive effects on the students' ability to positively cope with adversity. Experiences of academics' care generated positive attitudes and feelings (including feelings of happiness, felt security and assurance) among the students and established a safe haven and a secure base for them to anchor themselves to the caring academics. These experiences motivated, encouraged and helped them positively take on challenges, search for resources to overcome their difficulties and positively cope with adversity. The significance of academics' care in facilitating the students' approaches to positive coping was further revealed in the students' reluctance to seek advice from university counsellors, whom they considered as remote strangers who offered no emotional attachment. The students also perceived university counsellors' advice as too general and unable to address their unique needs and concerns, especially under the view that university counsellors lacked discipline-related knowledge. Hence, they thought that only the academics, whom they trusted, and those who knew about their character, capabilities and the like were able to give



them insightful and customized advice and truly help them. Thus, the students' prolonged immersion in academics' care made them feel well cared for and allowed them to gradually develop caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships.

The feeling of being well cared for did not come from a vacuum. It was gradually cultivated and built up by the "Pedagogical Care" the students experienced, and was gradually deepened through "Holistic Care" and "Sustainable Care". In this way, the students' experiences of "Pedagogical Care" through the academics' caring teaching, customizing advice and so forth contributed to fostering their feelings of being cared for. In other words, the academics' pedagogical practices and instructional qualities that addressed the affective aspect of learning and the relational zone played an important role in nurturing the students' feelings of being cared for and hence addressing their emotional needs. As such, the affective aspect of learning was perceived as important in instilling the feelings of being well cared for and hence promoting students' well-being. However, Vygotsky (1978) seemingly did not clearly address the effects of the relational zone on learners' well-being. Thus, this study addressed the shortfall of the literature in addressing the positive influence of the affective aspects of learning on students' well-being.

More importantly, this persistent immersion in academics' care was able to cultivate a sustainable caring teacher-student relationship and grow it into a sustainable bond between the students and caring academics that extended into the future. This not only led the students to see the caring academics as attachment figures at the present time, but also extended their safe haven and secure base to their prospective futures and lives after graduation. It thus engendered the students with daring spirits, feelings of felt security, confidence and positive attitudes to take on challenges. These positive attitudes and methods of coping in times of difficulties contributed to addressing the students' well-being. This has implied the importance of having the kind of sustainable attachment bond cultivated by academics' care for the enhancement of students' well-being.

Serving as a “Safety Net” and generating “Sustainable Bonding”, academics’ care was important in not only providing students with support and guidance, but also promoting their well-being. The empirical data corroborated Noddings (1984) and Goldstein’s (1999) findings that teachers played a key role in establishing affective and felt-secure teacher-student relationships that facilitated students’ learning, helping them meet their emotional needs and promoting their well-being. Noddings (1984) and Goldstein (1999) found that teacher care was a key element in such a relationship. Moreover, the findings of this thesis reinforced the proposition advanced by Jacklin and Robinson (2007) and Warwick et al. (2008) that relation-oriented coping strategies, including the presence of friendly and non-judgmental staff and the development of good tutor-student relationships, benefitted university students’ learning, holistic development and emotional well-being. This thesis has shed light on the significant role of academics’ care in promoting students’ well-being.

As the informants discussed, studying happily was considered as a key construct of students’ well-being. In a society such as Hong Kong, with its emphasis on materialistic achievement, studying happily seemed to be forgotten when everyone’s attention focused on the materialistic ends of obtaining good grades and then a career that enabled one to earn more money and gain materialistic success. Studying happily seemed to be marginalized by the values placed on materialistic outcomes. This was not done to undermine the importance of developing a promising career. Rather, it was done to address the prime significance of a happy and enjoyable learning process in the pursuit of knowledge and its effects on one’s well-being. One way to promote a pleasurable, caring and supportive learning context might lie in the role of academics’ care in the enhancement of students’ well-being.

Academics’ care was not just about the academics’ psychological disposition or passionate drive to give care to the students. Rather, academics’ care was translated into

concrete actions taken to mentor the students so as to facilitate their learning and holistic development and promote their well-being. The “Safety Net” and “Sustainable Bonding” were identified as dual overarching themes associated with academics’ care. They were most distinctively discerned in discussions of “Holistic Care” and “Sustainable Care”. Yet, the caring teacher-student relationships and sustainable caring bond were gradually and dialectically built up through academics’ care, trust and caring behaviour following the initial teacher-student contact made through “Pedagogical Care”. Thus, academics’ care was conceptualized as a continuum of care moving from “Pedagogical Care” to “Holistic Care” and then “Sustainable Care”, and featured a deepening mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity between the caring academics and students.

### **5.3. Significance of Academics’ Care in the Chinese Cultural Context**

The significance of academics’ care in facilitating students’ learning and development and promoting their well-being in the Chinese cultural context has been corroborated by the Chinese conception of social relationships and its ensuing social roles and obligations. Similar to Noddings (1984), who conceptualized chains of relations, Fei (1992) conceptualized Chinese social relationships as a web of concentric social circles. However, there was a fundamental difference between the two. Noddings’ (1984) conception of ethical care and chains of caring in the Western context is inclusive. This was in contrast to Fei’s (1992) discussions of the differentiated, concentric circles of relationships in the Chinese context, which are exclusive. This may explain why ethical care cannot be totally applied to the Chinese setting. The relation-oriented Chinese society features a web of interconnected social relationships and a distinctive in- and out-group delineation (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Hofstede et al., 2010). This has implied that in this study of academics’ care as founded on the relational construct, care played an even more significant role in influencing the affective aspect of learning and the attachment bonding on facilitating students’ learning and development and promoting their well-being.

The importance of academics' care in the Chinese context had to be related to the Chinese conception of hierarchical social relations. The teacher-student relationship in Chinese society was traditionally moulded on the father-son dyad with an emphasis on filial piety (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996; Yan, 2009). Teachers were seen as supportive, kind and respectful fatherly figure, with a stern, authoritative, strict, distant and self-restrained image in the traditional Chinese context (Bond, 1991; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). However, the informants did not conceptualize the caring academics in such a way. There was a noted change in the perception of teachers' image from the traditional role of the "father" to the role of the mentor among the informants. Although the informants mentioned parental images, most of them saw the caring academics as mentors and expected to engage in friendly and less hierarchical relationships with the latter. This was aligned with previous studies, which observed a change in the perception of good teachers, once perceived as father figures, they came to be perceived as mother figures and friends and on a more egalitarian basis (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001). Cortazzi and Jin's (2001) discussion was contextualized to the school setting. This thesis showed that the shift in the perceived teacher image from the traditional, authoritative fatherly figure to a more egalitarian mentor role could also be discerned in the university context.

Nevertheless, the deeply entrenched hierarchical relations and ensuing social roles and obligations prevailed in the mind-set of the informants and influenced their expectations of academics' care. In the Chinese context, the hierarchical relations govern how social actors interact with one another according to one's social place and ranking, and power and status come with moral obligations (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996) and connect teachers and students together (Li and Du, 2013). Caring for others and especially for juniors beyond natural care in the Chinese context has been "institutionalized" by the social obligations as shaped by *Wu Lun* (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). According to *Wu Lun*, teachers (the seniors) are expected to assume their social roles and the ensued moral obligations and responsibilities for providing protection and care to

students (the juniors) (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996). In return, students are expected to show respect for and obedience towards teachers (*ibid.*). Teacher-student relationships are expected to brim with responsibility, respect, acceptance, warmth and affect (Biggs and Watkins, 1996). Thus, it was not surprising to learn that the informants expected care and protection from the caring academics, whom they saw as a refuge with a long-term orientation to ward off the vicissitudes of life.

The results of this study of academics' care were aligned with the discussions of adult attachment theory related to seeking out significant others as a safe haven and a secure base. However, this research also showed that students' expectations and tendency to look for attachment bonding and a secure base were further accentuated and reinforced by the relation-oriented social relationships and the moral obligations of social roles according to Chinese cultural influences. More importantly, this study demonstrated that students held a long-term view towards sustaining their attachment bonding with caring academics and hence expected such a sustainable bonding to grow and extend into the future. These findings addressed the limitations of the literature on adult attachment theory in the educational context, which mainly focused on the attachment bonding between teachers and students during their school years. Thus, this thesis has recognized the significant effects of academic's care on creating a secure base and attachment bonding in the Chinese context.

Coupled with the distinct in- and out-group delineation embedded in the Chinese collectivist context, the perceived effects of significant others on students through attachment bonding and the affective aspect of learning might become even more important. As influenced by the clear in- and out-group delineation, individuals have strong attachments to in-group members, who are their familial and kinship members and close friends, and are indifferent to out-group members, who are strangers or acquaintances (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992). In view of this, cultivating a caring relationship with the students, further maturing it into a closer relationship and moving the students

to see the caring academics as in-group members might have significantly contributed to facilitating the students' learning and development and promoting their well-being. One's inner circle should be expected to provide care and protection over time to ward off the vicissitudes of life and serve as a safety net (Bond, 1991). More importantly, Wang and Song (2010) indicated that feedback from significant others should be considered more influential and profound in the Chinese context. Thus, the effects might have been even more profound when the students considered the academics as in-group members.

Apart from that, the empirical data unveiled the agency power of the students in forming attachment bonding in the Chinese context. Attachment organization is typically affected by cultural differences (Pistole, 1999). In the Chinese context, each person is related to another in differential and distinctive relationships in terms of their relational closeness and the social hierarchy (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Wang and Song, 2010). Chinese adult attachment is relation-based and context-specific (Wang and Song, 2010). The conceptions of self, significant others and relationships are inseparable entities in the Chinese culture, and interactions are also relation-specific and context-specific (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Wang and Song, 2010). Nevertheless, whether teachers can become students' in-group members is not bounded by *Wu Lun*. In- and out-group delineation does not contradict with the hierarchical relations in the Chinese context. Hierarchical relations overlap with in- and out-group delineation to create an intricate web of social relationships with a distinct degree of closeness based on the hierarchy in the Chinese society. Individuals can still exercise agency power to determine which social actors are placed at the centre or periphery of the concentric circles with different degrees of closeness to delineate the differential social relationships (Fei, 1992). Teachers might take on a distant, moral role, rather than becoming a close confidant from whom students seek help and advice. This has implied that whether the students in this study disclosed personal and private information and whether they sought help and advice from a particular senior were subject to the degree of closeness in the differential social relationships. Students had the agency power and autonomy to choose not to disclose

any deep knowledge to their teachers. This has recognized the significance of developing caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships through academics' care to let the students consider the caring academics as both in-group members and a secure base.

The effects of caring pedagogy might have been even more profound when the students considered the academics as in-group members. Once the academics were regarded as in-group members, this inferred that the students would be more willing to disclose wide-ranging and more personal knowledge to the academics. The caring academics would then be in a more advantageous position to extend support and offer guidance to the students to address their needs and concerns. The clear in- and out-group delineation may also explain why the students held an apathetic attitude towards counsellors, not to mention the collective stigma they held towards mental health issues (Stewart et al, 2002; Tsang et al., 2003; Sing and Wong, 2010). In view of this, implementing a caring pedagogy might have helped the students learn to adopt positive coping strategies to deal with their difficulties and challenges under the mentorship of the caring academics. This might have exerted positive effects that promoted the well-being of students, especially at-risk students.

Teachers are typically seen as moral role models who uphold moral integrity in Chinese society (Bond, 1991; Fei, 1992; Goodwin and Tang, 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of role modelling in social learning. In the Chinese context, teachers who assume the fatherly role are expected to act as exemplar models of morality and especially models of how to become a whole person of highly regarded character and integrity by practising good conduct, exemplifying self-cultivation and enacting moral principles and obligations for the collectivist benefit (Biggs and Watkins, 2001; Gao and Watkins, 2001; Shim, 2008). The moral dimension is central to Chinese teaching (Bond, 1991; Biggs and Watkins, 2001). This might explain the informants' emphasis on seeing the caring academics as role models.

The role modelling effects might be more profound after the academics have become the students' in-group members. The informants emphasized the academics' caring attitudes and behaviour as expressed through daily contact contributed to constructing a caring teacher-student relationship. The students' caring experiences convinced them that the particular caring academics were worthy role models on whom they could model their behaviour. The cardinal role of academics' care in immersing the students in experiences with the caring academics was underlined. This might have had profound implications for the cultivation of caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationships that allowed the students to see the caring academics as in-group members. This was aligned with a discussion presented by Wang and Song (2010), who claimed that the feedback of significant others was considered more influential and profound in the Chinese context. After becoming the students' in-group members, the caring academics were in a more advantageous position to serve as role models mentoring the students to positively cope with problems and as a secure base for the students to thrive in their holistic development.

Given that Chinese society is a relation-oriented and hierarchical society that emphasizes its seniors' moral obligations to extend care and protection to its juniors, academics' care might have played an even more influential role in exerting positive effects on the students, especially the at-risk students. The effects might have been even more profound when the students saw the caring academics as their in-group members and attachment figures. As such, discussing the affective aspect of learning and adult attachment in the Chinese pedagogical context helped produce insights into academics' creating a caring learning ethos and becoming students' in-group members and hence offering them a secure base to facilitate their learning, exploration and holistic development. The empirical data corroborated the significance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic development and well-being (Warwick et al., 2008; Hyland, 2010). A support programme cannot be the sole or standalone purview of counsellors' responsibilities (Warwick et al., 2008). The faculty should assume responsibility for



students' holistic development (McLaughlin, 2008; Shek, 2010). Considering this, integrating academics' care into the pedagogy might be an effective means of facilitating students' learning and development and promoting their well-being, especially at-risk students. This would address the Chinese conception of relations and its implications for relation-oriented pedagogy, including caring pedagogy. In this study, caring pedagogy not only addressed the centrality of the affective aspect of learning in the relational construct, but also responded to the significance of attachment bonding in facilitating students' exploration and holistic development. The pedagogical implications of academics' care in the Chinese higher education context thus deserved attention.

#### **5.4. Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education: Relational Zone, Attachment Behaviour and Socio-cultural Context**

This thesis revealed that academics' care was conceptualized as a continuum of care moving from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care", and featured a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity between academics and students. The "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" were identified as the dual overarching themes of academics' care in learning facilitation, relationship building and attachment bonding. This study reflected the centrality of academics' care in establishing a caring, trusted and bonded teacher-student relationship and cultivating a caring learning ethos to gradually build up attachment bonding and mature it into sustainable bonding. It also recognized the significance of implementing caring pedagogy in the university context, thereby acknowledging the primacy of the academics' care enacted in everyday teacher-student contact.

Academics' care was conceptualized as a continuum. Students expected an initial level of care. That initial care, expressed as "Pedagogical Care" constituted the basic unspoken relational and psychological contract between academics and students, with the

academics assuming the role and responsibilities of teachers. However, the students did not conceive of learning as a cognitive matter alone, they also considered it an affective process, and they did not separate the two in their experiences of higher education. Some of the academics could facilitate both affect and intellect, but some could not. Nevertheless, not all of the students needed such attention paid to their emotions, and not all of the academics were able to, even if they wanted to. This was aligned with studies that have found that care involves personal disposition and professional volition to a certain extent (Goldstein, 1999; Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). It was also aligned with a study by Clegg et al. (2006), who found that university students were independent and autonomous young adults. When the faculty did attend to the students' emotional needs and affective domains, and offer care as such, the students quickly got to know who was who in terms of their ability to care. The students were able to clearly articulate those with whom they experienced the initial "Pedagogical Care" and caring pedagogy. Students with their agency capacity were then actively negotiating the caring behaviour and boundaries with academics when moving along the continuum of care. Considering that this thesis aimed to explore students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care, our discussions of boundary negotiation focused more from students' views, concerning their feelings of ambivalence and as such entering into paradoxical dynamics in negotiating and constructing the caring boundaries with academics.

The negotiation of academics' care, encompassing the caring behaviour and boundaries, between students and academics was an ongoing, dynamic and dialectical process, filled with students' ambivalent feelings and resulted in entering into paradoxical dynamics moving along the continuum from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and "Sustainable Care". The students felt ambivalent, hesitant and puzzled about seeking care and help from the academics, because of their self-constructed identities of university students as independent and autonomous young adults through the socialization from society, parents and academics. For examples, the academics at Crystal University kept reminding the students that they were grown-up and had to take the initiative and responsibilities

for studying and solving problems independently, and for developing into a professional for their prospective careers, rather than expecting microscopic care or spoon-feeding help. Seeking care from the academics appeared to contradict the students' self-constructed identities as influenced by their socialization. This was aligned with Clegg et al.'s (2006) research into university students in United Kingdom that the students considered help seeking when coping with difficulties as a failure or a loss of face due to the incongruities in their self-constructed university students' identities as independent and autonomous adults. Nevertheless, this thesis has revealed that the students were still in a transition period from "wanting" more intensive kinds of care to assuming the responsibilities of an autonomous and independent adult learner in university study. They still straddled the identities of student and grown-up, and hence they held ambivalent attitudes towards academics' care and help.

Students' feelings of ambivalence were as though the ebb and flow of expecting and refraining from seeking academics' care, and as such entering into paradoxical dynamics in negotiating the caring behaviour and boundaries with academics along the continuum. On the one hand, the students wanted the academics to care about and help them in different aspects of their life, namely study, careers and personal concerns. On the other hand, they were aware that they could not overly rely on the academics' care or aid, which was incongruous with their self-constructed identities as independent and autonomous adults. They were also conscious that some academics at Crystal University adopted a laissez-faire approach for the sake of facilitating them to achieve holistic development into independent learners and problem-solvers, and into mature, full-fledged professionals in their prospective careers. This has resulted in paradoxical dynamics in students' boundary negotiation with academics in mediating the caring behaviour. The paradoxical dynamics were expressed in the blurred, dynamic and accommodating caring boundaries continuously negotiated and reconstructed between students and academics along the continuum of academics' care.

Embarked on “Pedagogical Care”, the caring boundaries were fuzzy. Since the students refrained from seeking help because of the ambivalent feelings and because trust has not yet been well-established with the academics, they expected that care would focus more on academic matters. They adopted test-the-water attitudes and actively observed academic-oriented caring behaviour, to find out who the caring academics were and who cared about them and were committed to doing more than the teaching duties and responsibilities entailed. The good teachers were perceived as pragmatic, instrumental and down-to-earth. They were strong in technical teaching competences, like delivering practical knowledge and its applications in an unambiguous and logical manner, being efficient in class management, talking to students in a down-to-earth tone and so forth. They responded to students’ seeking more care and guidance by adjusting their pedagogies. Their caring behaviour remained in the pedagogical aspect even after students attempted to asking for more. In contrast, the caring teachers were perceived as caring, kind, considerate, empathetic and affective. They would be absorbed into the students’ thinking and feelings, and motivationally displaced by the students’ sentiments (Noddings, 1984), after the students’ seeking more care and coaching. They also gave primacy to the students’ needs, internalized the students’ goals as their own realities; and were driven to act for the students (Tappan, 1998; Kim, 2007; Velasquez et al., 2013). This has reflected the nuances of differences in good and caring teachers’ approaches to caring about and caring for the students. The former tended to use more pragmatic and instrumental approach focusing more on effective and efficient knowledge transmission and tapping into the cognitive dimension of learning; while the latter subconsciously tended to integrate the affective and cognitive aspects of learning together to teach the students, and inspire, encourage and motivate them during the learning process. These discussions have thus revealed important implications for integrating care into pedagogy.

More importantly, the above discussions have corroborated the significance of interconnecting the affect and cognition in students’ learning process (Vygotsky, 1978; Goldstein, 1999), and as such substantiated the integration of care into pedagogy. The

discussions have also justified that care is an essential quality that distinguishes outstanding teachers from good ones (Noddings, 1984; Weinstein, 1989; Goldstein, 1999; Hattie, 2003; Kim, 2007; Bauml, 2009). On the other hand, the discussions have refuted Graham's (1983) binary dichotomy between "caring about" and "caring for". Caring about and caring for ranged from a degree of intensity, rather than being in an all-or-nothing approach. It could not deny that good teachers did care about students; otherwise they would not care for adjusting their pedagogies to respond to students' asking for more guidance. As compared with caring teachers, good teachers might be caring about the students in a different way, in other words being more instrumental and pragmatic in their approaches and focusing more on the down-to-earth academic matters to respond students' fundamental purpose of coming to university for knowledge acquisition. Yet, deep down the students expected and attempted to negotiate more academics' care on different aspects of their lives. Caring teachers who were devoted to doing more than the teaching duties and obligations entailed came into caring about students' broad spectrum of life. The negotiation of care and its boundaries in "Pedagogical Care" would either deepen or undermine the trust, mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity between students and academics, and as such would move academics' care along the continuum of care or restrain its movement towards "Holistic Care" and "Sustainable Care".

The caring boundaries in "Holistic Care" were dynamic and notably moving back and forth as though the ebb and flow. Nevertheless, although the students might have desired more mutuality and reciprocity in their experiences of "Holistic Care" and "Sustainable Care", not all of the academics could offer it. The students gained a clearer view of who the caring academics were after testing the waters in "Pedagogical Care". The caring academics were dedicated to doing more than the teaching responsibilities and obligations entailed. Although the caring academics might have often felt overwhelmed, they chose to care, and hence did not interpret their care as a burden, even when faced with high levels of emotional labour. The caring academics who were passionate and

genuinely cared about the students were identified as a safe haven and a secure base. Though the students might feel ambivalent and uncertain about seeking more help, they tended to ask for more care and guidance after identified who the caring academics were and experienced their genuine care. The caring domains were no longer confined to study matters alone, but extended to personal and career concerns. The students sought more care and mentorship from the caring academics while from time to time still felt the need of refraining from asking for more. The boundary negotiation was then swayed by students' making advances on asking for more care and coaching in different aspects of life, and their conscious restraint from doing so because of their awareness of the self-constructed identities as autonomous young adults. This has reflected the students' feelings of ambivalence, and as such the paradoxical dynamics at work in influencing the negotiation and construct of care and caring boundaries between students and academics. The caring boundaries were thus distinguished by its dynamic and ebb-and-flow shifts articulated between students and academics. The ongoing and dynamic negotiation and dialogues between students and academics would further deepen the trust, mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity and as such would move academics' care along the continuum towards "Sustainable Care".

The caring boundaries in "Sustainable Care" were flexible, accommodating and distinguished by its future orientation. The students gradually became more engaged in their relationships with the caring academics, and mutually transformed their caring and trusted relationships into "Sustainable Bonding". The caring domains were future-oriented focusing on students' anticipated personal and career concerns and their eagerness to reciprocate care to the academics. The students' ambivalent feelings were relatively relieved while filled with the uplifting spirits to reciprocate care to the academics. This has contributed to facilitating the students' active negotiation and co-construct of the caring boundaries with the academics, tending to accommodate the students' anticipated needs and concerns, as well as to reciprocate care to the academics in the future. As such, one of the distinctive features was the students' reciprocal care to

the academics, rather than the students' sole seeking care and help concerning their own problems. Another salient feature was its long-term orientation towards the future. The caring boundaries were then reversed and re-defined to incorporate reciprocal care to the caring academics in the prospective future. Lapse as it might seem, the caring boundaries were distinguished by the students' active negotiation and co-construct with the academics to initiate a mutually-customized, future-oriented boundary accommodating both the students and the academics' needs and concerns. This was aligned with the themes of future-oriented "Sustainable Bonding" and reciprocal care in "Sustainable Care". Thus, the caring boundaries were distinguished by being a flexible one set not only for the present, but also extended to the prospective future.

In view of this, it was difficult, and almost impossible, to draw a clear-cut and neat-and-tidy boundary that delineated the caring relationships and behaviour between students and academics. Care is personally experienced and full of individual emotions conditional on the customized interactions between the one-caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 1984; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Fine, 2007; Garza, 2009). Care is considered as a unique expression of a social relationship (Daly and Lewis, 2000; Daly, 2002; Fine, 2007). As such, it had to recognize the nuances of differences in students' conceptions, expectations and experiences of care in each of the caring encounters as influenced by the particular social interactions and relationships (Bowden, 1997; Fine, 2007; Garza, 2009). Therefore, the caring boundaries were inherently blurred, fluid and flexible as influenced by the relational dynamics. The caring behaviour and boundaries were personal subject to individual student and teacher's negotiation and construct. Some students expected more care from academics; while some expected a more distant approach and focused more on classroom interactions. They were pretty certain that not all of the academics could offer them the care expected. The caring behaviour would be varied upon the negotiation and dialogues between students and academics concerning different domains included study, careers and other personal concerns encountered at present or anticipated in the future. Thus, the caring boundaries would not be neat and

tidy, or be the same for every student and teacher. Instead, the boundaries were fuzzy, dynamic and accommodating subject to the mutual negotiation, articulation and construct, and the constant regressions and advances, oriented towards both the present and the prospective future. It was also noteworthy that the boundaries were conditional on the trust, mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity established and gradually deepened between students and academics along the continuum of care. This has corroborated the proposition that the psycho-social state involving in the specific caring encounters, and the caring boundaries and meanings mediated are subject to the continuous mutual construct, negotiation and re-construct between the one-caring and the cared-for (Fine, 2007).

The dynamic negotiation process has reflected students' active agency role in dialectically co-constructing care and caring boundaries with academics. This was aligned with Fine's (2007) discussion that the cared-for, being an active social agent, chose to establish and sustain the social relationships and to respond to the attention and care received out of their volition during the process of relationship building. Since the first teaching encounters, the students held an observant attitude and test-the-water approach to panoramically observing the academics to see whether the academics were passionate about teaching and caring about them and as such were willing to do more than the teaching tasks and responsibilities entailed before the students felt secure to move on to ask for more care and help. Considering this, the students assumed their agency role and dynamically participated in observing, testing the waters, negotiating and co-constructing the caring relationships, behaviour and boundaries with the academics. This was in contrast to the feminist and Tronto's (1993) depiction of care recipients as a passive and dependent object involving one-way transaction only. The students' agency capacity made an impact on mediating the caring behaviour and boundaries with the academics. This has implied that the negotiation and construct of care and its meanings and boundaries were subject to the specific relational dynamics and psycho-social disposition.



Apart from the psycho-social dynamics, the negotiation and construct of care between students and academics was also conditional on institutional influences, either facilitating academics' care or restricting it. The Dean of the School, where our informants studied at, advocated and promoted a school culture of not only being learner-centred, but also placing the students as the faculty's prime concerns and top priority. The Dean has championed a culture like servant leadership to fostering a caring, supportive and serving ethos of putting the students' needs first and supporting their holistic growth. As such, based on my observations, the academics in the School were committed to caring and mentoring the students, and doing more than the teaching duties, responsibilities and obligations entailed, in order to support and facilitate the students to achieve holistic development. This was also in accord with Crystal University's emphasis on developing students holistically into all-rounded professionals to apply knowledge for the betterment of the society under the overall university ethos of providing intensive care and support to help students. Though some faculty members adopted a laissez-faire approach to classroom teaching and after-class consultations, the students understood that the underlying purposes of the hands-off approach were to facilitate them to achieve all-rounded development into an independent, autonomous and mature learner and problem solver during their university study so as to groom them to become full-fledged professionals in their prospective careers, rather than letting them getting into the habits of overly depending on academics' help. This has refuted the claims of therapeutic discourse. This has also reflected the significant influences of an institution's overall caring ethos on supporting and grooming students to become an independent learner and a mature young professional for their prospective career development. This was aligned with the advocacy of the importance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic growth and well-being (Warwick et al., 2008; Hyland, 2010).

The discussions of institutional ethos have also drawn our attention to the overall socio-cultural influences at work in shaping the negotiation and construct of care and caring

boundaries between students and academics. In this regard, I would like to quote once again the informant's insightful remark from her write-up account about conceptualizing academics' care as doing more than the teaching assignments and responsibilities entailed as influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, in order to illustrate how the students' implicit expectations were shaped by the socio-cultural context.

Amelia thoughtfully wrote the following in her write-up account, "*Teachers do far more than just share their knowledge with us. An (ancient) Chinese scholar said, '(Teacher's responsibilities are to) propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts.'*" Amelia added, "*A teacher demonstrating academics' care is performing not only his/her responsibilities, but also something more.*"

The above discussions have not only revealed the psycho-social emotions involving in the particular teacher-student relationships in affecting the processes of negotiating and constructing caring behaviour and boundaries, but also unveiled the socio-cultural shaping at work in exerting influences on students' expectations of academics' care. This has led us to conceptualize academics' care as a complex and subtle form of care as influenced by the psycho-social dynamics negotiated by the caring teacher-student relationships, as well as shaped by the specific socio-cultural context. This research has shed light on the significance of taking the psycho-social dynamics and socio-cultural context into account when investigating how students and academics negotiated and constructed caring behaviour and boundaries, and exploring how care was to be integrated into pedagogy. Nevertheless, there was a dearth of literature on teacher care in the university context addressing students' psycho-social disposition (included the ambivalent feelings and paradoxical dynamics) and their agency roles in negotiating care and caring boundaries with academics, or the influences of socio-cultural context (included the institutional influences and socio-cultural shaping) on the negotiation process. This thesis has contributed to understanding more about students' dialectical negotiation and co-construct of caring relationships, behaviour and boundaries with academics. This has thus cast light on the complexity and subtlety of academics' care in

the university context, while disproved reducing academics' care to menial caring work. This has facilitated us to envisage the centrality of academics' care in students' learning, and as such to regard academics' commitment to caring about and caring for students as a valued caring profession, rather than being marginalized in the university context.

An embryonic form of caring pedagogy thus emerged in the university context. In other words, the caring pedagogy was enacted in an informal way conditional on the caring academics' volitional commitment to caring about the students (Walker-Gleaves, 2009; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). They chose to care, support and mentor the students, despite possibly feeling overwhelmed by their teaching workloads, research undertakings and other administrative or work duties. This was aligned with Finch and Groves' (1983) portrayal of care as labour of love, and has thus implied the caring academics' personal commitment to caring work and self-constructed identities as a caring profession, despite the struggle between research and caring teaching work. This has suggested that the centrality of caring work as a calling and self-constructed identities would drive the caring academics to continuously devoted to caring about and caring for the students despite all the seemingly extra workload and the oftentimes frustrations along the way. As a result, this has reflected that the caring academics attempted their best to defy the depersonalized care (as discussed by Graham, 1983) in the face of the growing globalized trends of stressing research outputs and quantified results. In this way, care acted as a form of resistance to the institutional structure and a form of personal disposition and professional commitment to caring, helping and guiding the students, despite the workloads or personal strains the academics faced. Despite their work pressure and demands in the face of a global managerial- and result-oriented higher education sector, the caring academics' dedication to caring about students was deeply appreciated and valued by the students. However, caring was not desirable as a policy, as constantly overwhelming the academics would have had negative effects on their well-being and long-term emotional health. This was also echoed by the informants' concerns about the academics' well-being and the institutions' support for the academics.

Mandy expressed the following sincerely and in a heart-warming tone, *“Nowadays, the academics face a lot of pressure personally, or the institutions do not give them enough support or resources. There’s a shortage of staff, and even when they have ‘Heart’ (to care about the students), they don’t have the time or effort. Perhaps some of the academics really want to care about the students, but they have too much workloads and administrative work. They can’t even finish their own work. How can they show concern for the students? The institutions have to give support ..... The academics help other people, but they also need to have good psychological health and have positive energy to genuinely help and influence others, in other words, to ‘re-charge their batteries sufficiently’ ..... to have less work pressure and have their stress alleviated. Then, they will have the positive energy necessary to make use of their positive attitudes and have an effect on the students.”*

This unexpected, heartfelt and heart-warming quotation from an informant about the importance of the academics’ well-being to their capacity to care for and effect on the students had two implications. First, it evidenced the argument related to “Sustainable Care”, that is, that academics’ care had a transformative and transcending quality that positively affected and facilitated students’ holistic growth into caring persons and engaged them in a virtuous cycle of care. Having been immersed in the dedicated academics’ care, the students being the cared-for were gradually socialized and transformed to assume the role of one-caring and express concerns and care for the academics’ well-being. Reciprocal care was pervasive in the students’ attitudes and words. This was not simply a verbal acknowledgement of the care on behalf of the one-caring. It was also a manifestation of the students’ genuine concerns and care for the academics, which went beyond mere verbal acknowledgement. This has implied the latent, but profound, influence of academics’ care on developing students into caring persons who would pass on care and engage in a virtuous cycle of caring for one another.

The potential effects of academics’ care on influencing and socializing students to become a wellspring for expressing and passing on care to others has implied the significance of

integrating care into pedagogy to facilitate students' holistic development and groom them to care about other people for the betterment of society. Teacher care is a central element in developing students as whole persons (Neill, 1960; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996). The cardinal role of academics' care in facilitating students' holistic growth into caring persons and engaging them in a virtuous cycle of care could not be overestimated. Tompkins (1996) and Hyland (2010) advocated that the purpose of university education was to cultivate wholeness and responsibility for developing students holistically. Higher education was about not only teaching the mind, but also and in a more vital sense educating the character.

Second, the informant's remark formed a persuasive argument for the integration of care into pedagogy and the promotion of a caring ethos in the university context. The study advocated that policy and programme planners and the other parties in the higher education sector seriously considered integrating caring pedagogy into universities' strategic plans, academic and student policies and pedagogical development to truly promote and foster a caring culture in the higher education sector for the benefit of students and academics. The well-being of academics was considered one of the constituents in the caring policies, pedagogical planning and culture creation. The integration of care into pedagogy should not be reduced to the course level when the individual faculty member planned and devised the delivery of subject content. It was suggested that care be integrated into strategic plans and policies at the university level to genuinely cultivate a culture of care, establish a vision of care, set a strategic plan of care, integrate care into programme and curriculum planning and provide sufficient support and resources to care about students and academics. This was aligned with Warwick et al. (2008) and Hyland's (2010) emphasis on the significance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic development and well-being. Taking the centrality of the relational construct and sustainable bonding in the Chinese context as shown in this study into consideration, the primacy of cultivating a caring culture in the university context

was of prime importance. Thus, it was suggested that universities promote caring pedagogy and culture in a more formal, strategic and structured way.

It was important, not to say critical, that education be about learning and not about counselling or therapeutic approaches, no matter how much it was acknowledged that education was a major antecedent of personal well-being. The integration of care into pedagogy was not advocated to undermine the roles and benefits of professional counselling in helping students. It was advocated to underline the potential benefits of caring pedagogy in facilitating students to positively cope with problems, pursue sustainable holistic growth and enhance their well-being. Learning was no longer confined to the classroom in the university setting. University students' independent learning, exploration of knowledge and the world and pursuit of holistic growth with appropriate mentorship were considered important. As such, integrating caring pedagogy into the university context deserved attention. Therefore, how to properly and usefully construct and promote a caring ethos and relational environment became an important question.

It was suggested that the students' developmental stages be considered when integrating care into pedagogy and cultivating a culture of care to facilitate their holistic development and promote their well-being. The increasing mental health concerns of university students, who were autonomous young adults, meant that promoting learner autonomy and self-efficacy and minimizing dependency were good academic strategies. In other words, purposeful and productive caring, although inevitable aspects of human nature, had to be conceptualized in educational terms as functions of both productive and purposeful socio-emotional relationships, while also serving as a predicate of particular academic development attributes such as autonomy and resilience. Therefore, the implications were that expectations and relational dynamics must be made explicit and clearer than ever before for students and academic staff, and that students would need to be educated as to their student-hood and scholarly journey through university. We

could ask that at what point did emotional acceptance in learning stopped actually being about academic development and started being about personal development. The complexity here was that it mattered to students very much, and that the relationship between academic and student was different for each individual student, and the academics needed to acknowledge and respond to that and also recognize that an important element of that was the socio-cultural context of the students, and the impact that this had on the psycho-social make-up of the students.

In view of this, this thesis, aligned with Shim (2008) and Walker-Gleaves' (2009) discussions, corroborated the distinctive Confucian teaching that influenced the students' interpretation and articulation of teacher care, hence implying the significance of taking the socio-cultural context into consideration when integrating care into pedagogy. The distinctive Chinese cultural conception of social relations, in which the juniors hold the expectations of the seniors in terms of giving care and protection, in addition to the Confucian teaching of the teachers serving as role models for character building, co-constructors of knowledge and mentors in walking the life and study journey together with the learners, have influenced university students' conceptions and expectations of academics' care in the Chinese context. This was substantiated by Walker-Gleaves' (2009) emphasis that a set of coherent actions legitimizing caring relationships was produced from a dual Confucian-Vygotskian framework. Confucian teachers were more receptive to students' needs and character and hence acted mindfully, individualized their teaching methods and critically contemplated the continual effects of one's teaching in response to the students to make their teaching relevant to each learner for the purpose of character cultivation (Shim, 2008; Walker-Gleaves, 2009). This underlined the centrality of being culturally responsive in enacting caring pedagogy, and underscored the significance of synthesizing the psycho-social make-up and socio-cultural context in conceptualizing the model of care in the higher education sector.

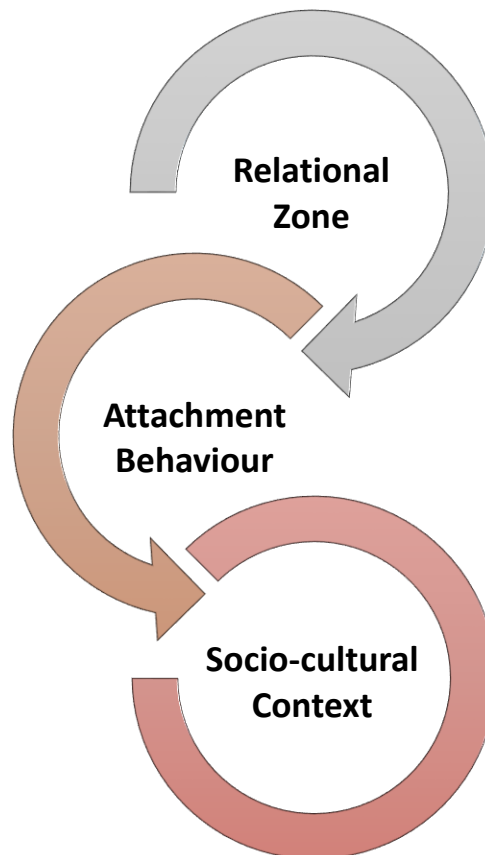
In light of this, any model of caring in higher education should rest on three overlapping domains of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context. Thus, in this study, the individual students' psycho-social make-up, needs and developmental stages were taken into account when care was integrated into pedagogy. Furthermore, the students' socio-cultural context, which shaped their upbringing and socialization was accounted for when the caring pedagogy was planned, implemented and enacted. It was advocated that caring pedagogy in the higher education context be a synthesis of the psycho-social make-up and relational construct as influenced by Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory, in addition to the socio-cultural context shaping the individuals' conceptions of relations, care, caring behaviour and the like, as influenced by the distinctive cultural setting in the particular environment. This was aligned with Shim's (2008) insightful discussions of teachers' roles that teaching was articulated as different approaches, as those of Plato, Confucius, Buber and Freire, under different distinctive historical and socio-cultural shaping. This study demonstrated that academics' care in the higher education context was subject to the dialectical influences of Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory under the specific cultural shaping. Thus, this thesis proposed a model of caring in higher education that rested on three overlapping domains, the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context. Figure 7 presents a schematic diagram for the "Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education".

The proposed conceptual model did not limit the transferability of this research. This study found that care was not influenced and constructed by the psycho-social make-up or socio-cultural context alone. Students' conceptions of and experiences with care were subject to the dialectic and synthesized influences of their psycho-social make-up and the inculcation under their particular socio-cultural context. The empirical findings thus demonstrated the distinctive dialectical synthesis and overlapping domains of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context influencing students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care, as such in affecting the actual



integration of care into pedagogy within the particular higher education context. This conceptual model, as demonstrated in this thesis, was found to be original and applicable to different cultural contexts, as it synthesized the psycho-social make-up and socio-cultural context in influencing the distinctive conceptions and expectations of academics' care in the higher education setting. This has recognized that the dialectical and synthesized influences of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context had to be considered when integrating care into pedagogy.

**Figure 7. Schematic Diagram for the Conceptual Model of Caring in Higher Education**



## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

### **6.1. Overview and Contribution to Knowledge**

This chapter discusses the conclusions of this study and the directions for future research. The discussion is framed by three interrelated bodies of research presented in the literature, including ethics of care, Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning and adult attachment theory. Data quality procedure, including triangulation, member checks and audit trail were followed to ensure the rigour of the research. The implications of the conclusions are offered for policy-makers, university administrators, teachers in all contexts and future researchers.

### **6.2. Academics' Care in the University Context**

This study made original contributions to the knowledge in five main ways. First, it added to the current research related to teacher care by conceptualizing academics' care as a continuum of care moving from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care" in the university context. "Pedagogical Care" focused on the academics' pedagogical commitment to teaching the subjects well and internalizing the students' study concerns and problems. "Holistic Care" was conceptualized as the academics' serving as a safe haven and a secure base akin to a "Safety Net" by always available for help, providing unwavering support and facilitating the students' autonomous and holistic growth. "Sustainable Care" was distinguished by "Sustainable Bonding" and reciprocal care with a long-term orientation. The students expected to maintain sustainable relationships and bonding with the caring academics, reciprocate their care, and extend help to them in the future. This has implied that the distinctive qualities of academics' care were able to help the students to engage in a virtuous cycle of care and hence reciprocate care to the academics and other people at present and in

the future. The continuum was not a progression from a lower level to a more advanced level; rather, it reflected a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity between the academics and students. Academics' care was conceptualized as dialectically moving along a continuum from focusing on students' learning to their holistic growth and then extending towards a prospective future of sustainable bonding and reciprocal care with a deepening of mutual engagement, commitment, responsiveness and reciprocity. This was an original finding related to teacher care in the university context.

Moreover, a dual overarching theme of the "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding" was identified in conceptualizing academics' care in the university context. Academics' care was conceptualized as a safe haven and a secure base and as such as a "Safety Net" and a "Sustainable bonding". Support and guidance were important to the students, particularly those that encouraged feelings of felt security and assurance, and psychological comfort. The students felt certain that the academics were always available for them to return to seek help, support and guidance. This study demonstrated that the attachment bonding and behaviour between the academics and students had the capacity to be extended to the future. The students expected that they could and would return to the academics whenever they were in need of help, comfort and advice no matter how far they had drifted away in their prospective career developments and no matter how distant into the future they did so. They viewed the relationships with the caring academics as having a long-term orientation and engaged in maintaining "Sustainable Bonding" with them to carry on the relationships so that they could serve as a "Safety Net" in the future. This was aligned with the discussions of adult attachment theory related to attachment figures serving as a safe haven and a secure base for students to thrive in their exploration and development. Nevertheless, research on adult attachment theory in the education field focused more on the attachment behaviour in the pre-school and school settings, rather than in the higher education sector. Meanwhile, the literature related to adult attachment in the university context focused more on

attachment behaviour within the students' term time at university, instead of exploring the latent effects on their prospective development and life after graduation. This study thus addressed these shortfalls and presented original contributions to the current literature related to teacher care in the university context.

Furthermore, this study has found that academics' care was distinguished by its reciprocal care with a long-term orientation in the university context. With a deepening of mutuality, responsiveness and reciprocity, the students felt appreciated and obliged towards the academics' care. They expressed their eagerness and willingness to reciprocate that care and offer help to the academics whenever the latter were in need, both at present and in the future, transcending the limitations of semester time. As such, care was no longer confined to a one-way uni-directional flow from the academics to the students; it was transformed into two-way bilateral flows between the academics and students, and even multilateral flows between the students and other people. This further evidenced the capacity of academics' care to transcend and transform care into a virtuous cycle of reciprocal care with sustainable bonding characterized by the maintenance of mutual commitment, responsiveness and reciprocity. Nevertheless, the literature related to adult attachment focused more on teacher-student bonding during students' semester time and centred on undergraduate or postgraduate students as the recipients of care, rather than theorizing their intentions and initiatives in reciprocating care to the teachers during their studies or in their prospective futures. Thus, this study's findings on reciprocal care being a key construct in "Sustainable Care" helped address the inadequacy of the current literature related to teacher care and adult attachment bonding in the under-theorized higher education domain.

In addition, the significance of academics' care in facilitating students' learning and holistic development and promoting their well-being was discerned in the Chinese context. This shed light on the positive effects of academics' care on students' learning and study motivations through the affective aspect of learning on their development

through the provision of a safe haven and a secure base, and on their well-being through the quintessential qualities of care. These effects were even more profound in the Chinese context, especially when the academics became the students' in-group members, in view of the distinctive Chinese conception of social relations and teachers' roles. This was an original contribution to the inadequate and under-theorized research related to teacher care, which has been contextualized to different cultural settings.

Finally, this study proposed a conceptual model for caring in the realm of higher education that rested on three overlapping domains of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context. It advocated that caring pedagogy in the higher education context must be a synthesis of the psycho-social make-up and relational construct as influenced by Vygotsky's affective aspect of learning, relational zone and adult attachment theory, in addition to the socio-cultural context shaping the individuals' conceptions of relations, care and caring behaviour as influenced by the distinctive cultural setting in the particular environment. This was an original contribution that sought to conceptualizing and theorizing a model of care and addressing the under-researched and under-theorized area of teacher care in the higher education sector.

This study rebutted the claims of therapeutic discourse in the university context. As the students identified themselves as independent young adults and autonomous learners, they looked for autonomy and agency on their paths of growth and saw the academics as mentors. University students were active social agents in negotiating the forms of care they expected from the academics. This was informed by their expectations and negotiations of the academics as a "Safety Net" and their engagement in cultivating a "Sustainable Bonding" with the academics to pursue an autonomous form of learning and self-directed development. This refuted the claims of therapeutic discourse in the university context. This study thus substantiated the importance of cultivating an overall university ethos of being non-stigmatizing, inclusive, positive, nurturing and caring in supporting students' holistic development and well-being (Warwick et al., 2008; Hyland,

2010). More importantly, it underlined the significance of integrating care into pedagogy in the higher education sector to address the pressing issues of the deteriorating psychological morbidity of Hong Kong university students, in addition to the alarming issue of growing cases of student suicide in Hong Kong.

In so doing, this study contributed new knowledge and original insights to the complex and significantly under-theorized and under-researched area of higher education academic work dealing with caring pedagogy. In this vein, the continuum of academics' care from "Pedagogical Care" to "Holistic Care" and then to "Sustainable Care", the dual overarching themes of the "Safety Net" and "Sustainable Bonding", and the significance of academics' care in the Chinese context were original to this study. They may well assist future policymakers, university administrators and teachers in further exploring the opportunities presented by integrating care into pedagogy.

### **6.3. Improvements for Future Phases of the Research**

The overall intent of this study was to investigate Hong Kong Chinese students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care in the naturalistic setting within a higher education context. Given that the desire for care is a universal need (Graham, 1983), this study was not initially designed to explore the cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of academics' care. The aims of this study were to explore academics' care based on students' lived experiences in the Chinese university setting, and not to make any cross-cultural comparisons. Therefore, the research design, literature review and discussions of the findings and conceptual analysis were not intended to engage in any cross-cultural comparisons of academics' care between the Chinese context and other cultural settings. As such, a further improvement in the research may bring forward literature and discussions from cross-cultural perspectives. This may add depth to some of this study's discussions of the informants' conceptions and experiences of academics'

care when analysis was contextualized to this particular cultural setting. However, the current study reflected the informants' lived experiences with academics' care and the meanings of care they constructed.

#### **6.4. Directions for Future Research**

This study's recommendations for future research focus on continuing investigations into two main areas, that is, the anthropological and cross-cultural study of academics' care, to further refine and corroborate the proposed model of caring in higher education, which rest on three overlapping domains of the relational zone, attachment behaviour and the socio-cultural context. First, a related study will be carried out to build on the current study, with the aim to investigate the socio-cultural influences on students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care. This will explore the different possibilities for integrating care into pedagogical practices and cultivating an inclusive, caring, trusted, bonded and supporting caring ethos to facilitate students' learning and development and promote their well-being under the particular cultural shaping. Second, cross-cultural differences in students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care should also be examined, in addition to their implications for cultural responsiveness in integrating care into pedagogy in a growing and culturally diverse learning context.

In the first case, the method of inquiry will follow the anthropological study of students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care in the Chinese higher education context. In doing so, the socio-cultural shaping of students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care will be examined through prolonged observations or participant observations of teaching practices and teacher-student interactions. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with students will be conducted and the reflective journals of both teachers and students will be solicited to complement and provide rich accounts in addition to the observations. This triangulation strategy will not only ensure

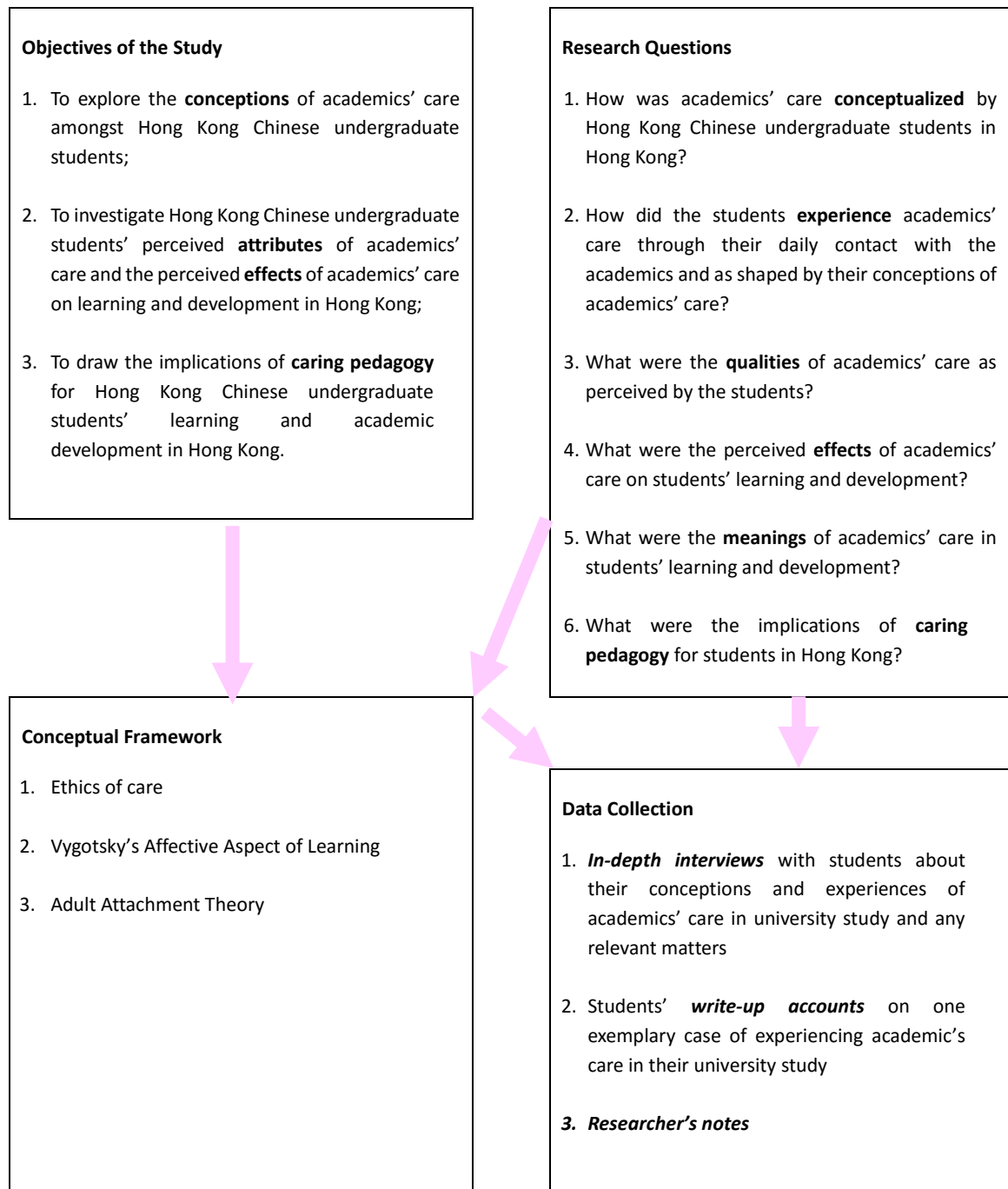
research rigour, but also provide rich and insightful data sources for analysis. Moreover, a wider range of objective data such as students' grades will be solicited so as to give a much clearer picture of the ecology of caring pedagogy and its effects on students' studies, motivation and other learning outcomes from an anthropological standpoint.

Along this same line, given the perceived significance of culturally responsive caring pedagogy in a growing and culturally diverse higher education context, future research should investigate the cross-cultural differences in students' conceptions of and experiences with academics' care in the Chinese and other cultural settings. This study direction is prompted by the empirical finding that reciprocal care with a long-term orientation is a distinctive construct in the Chinese conception of academics' care. Such findings generate a need to further explore whether other ethnic groups conceptualize academics' care differently than the Chinese. If so, what are the perceived differences in conceptions, constructs and qualities across different ethnic groups as influenced by their distinctive cultural shaping? Answering this would require studying other Asian cultures (like Japanese and Korean cultures, which have also been influenced by Confucianism), Caucasian and other ethnic groups in their own indigenous settings in terms of their students' conceptions of academics' care. Given that universities have become more culturally diversified due to globalization, it should also be interesting to exploring the Chinese and other ethnic groups studying in different cultural settings (such as Western contexts) in terms of their conceptions of and experiences with academics' care. In particular, will the differences in conceptions of academics' care between students of various ethnic groups and faculty members from various socio-cultural backgrounds exert any particular effect on students' learning and development? Answering this question will not only address the under-researched and under-theorized domain of teacher care in the higher education sector, but also call for more attention paid to caring and culturally responsive pedagogies. The prospective research should further refine and corroborate the issues of transferability considered in this study.



These investigations should not only add to the broader literature related to the significant yet under-researched and under-theorized caring pedagogy within the realm of higher education, but also be of importance to both academic educators at the higher education level and to university policymakers, who may re-conceptualize academics' care where differently conceived pedagogies may flourish.

## Appendix 1. Representation of the Whole Study



## Appendix 2. Letter of Invitation

Dear Students

### **Invitation for Participating in the Research on Academics' Care**

I am currently studying Doctor of Education in School of Education in Durham University, and conducting a thesis on "***An exploratory study of Hong Kong Chinese students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care within a higher education context***". In this regard, you are cordially invited to participate in this research.

This thesis is with the expectation of informing the present and future research into caring pedagogy in higher education sector. The research purposes are as below.

- 1) To explore the conceptions of academics' care amongst Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students;
- 2) To investigate Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' perceived attributes of academics' care and the perceived effects of academics' care on learning and development in Hong Kong;
- 3) To draw the implications of caring pedagogy for Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students' learning and academic development in Hong Kong.

Your invaluable insights into academics' care in the university context will be crucial to completion of this research. There is no right or wrong answer. Your genuine sharing based on your own stance and perspectives will be most valuable and helpful to enlighten the understanding of academics' care. Your participation will make significant contributions to developing caring pedagogy for the benefits of the prospective undergraduate students.

In the light of Hong Kong Chinese students being the focus of the research, we look for **students who are Hong Kong Chinese, as well as who have experiences of academics' care during your study in Crystal University.**

## ***Appendix 2: Letter of Invitation (Continued)***

The research is a qualitative study. Participating in the in-depth interviews and the write-up accounts will be your main engagement in this research. Please refer to the below brief about your expected involvement in the research process.

1. Write up a narrative account of one exemplary case of experiencing academic's care in your university study
2. Participate in in-depth interview, approximately 1 hour
3. Participate in follow-up interviews if further information is needed or clarification of the data is required for supplementing any information collected in the previous interviews
4. Verify the transcripts of in-depth interviews
5. Provide any other information relevant to the study

The in-depth interviews will be tape-recorded for analysis. Please be assured that your identities will not be disclosed by using pseudonym, and all the data collected will be kept confidential for the research purpose only. The research is conducted independent of your study. Therefore, your participation or not in the research, or your responses and opinions shared will have absolutely **NO** effect on your academic assessment or grade in Crystal University. You are welcome to participate in the research analysis and data interpretation processes. Besides, you have the right to withdraw at any point of the research. If you are interested in the research results, we are pleased to share our research findings with you in due course.

Please note that the research has full Ethics Approval from my institutions of work and candidature. My Chief Doctoral Supervisor is Dr Caroline Walker-Gleaves, School of Education of Durham University.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please reply email to me by **31<sup>st</sup> January, 2014**. In the reply email, please state **your full name, English name, contact email and mobile phone number**. We will arrange appointments with you in due course in order to give you a detailed verbal explanation of the research and research process, to give you the opportunity to clarify any relevant matters, and to forward you the consent form for your signature.

Your support to our research on enhancing student learning is much appreciated. If you have any queries or would like to discuss any matters relevant to this research, please feel free to call me or email me.

Warmest Regards  
Anne Tang

### Appendix 3. Consent Form

Durham University  
School of Education

#### Consent Form

***An exploratory study of Hong Kong Chinese students' conceptions and experiences of academics' care within a higher education context***

*Please cross out  
as necessary*

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet (Letter of Invitation)? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Who have you spoke to? ***Ms Lai La TANG (Anne Tang) (Candidate of Doctor of Education)***

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES / NO

Are you aware that the in-depth interviews will be audio-taped for research purpose? YES / NO

Do you consent to have your in-depth interviews audio-taped for research purpose? YES / NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

\*at any time and

\*without having to give a reason for withdrawing and

\*without affecting your study in the University?

YES / NO

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix 4. Study's Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Data Collection Methods</i>
1. How was academics' care <b>conceptualized</b> by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Students' write-up accounts</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>
2. How did the students <b>experience</b> academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Students' write-up accounts</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>
3. What were the <b>qualities</b> of academics' care as perceived by the students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Students' write-up accounts</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>
4. What were the perceived <b>effects</b> of academics' care on students' learning and development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>
5. What were the <b>meanings</b> of academics' care in students' learning and development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>
6. What were the implications of <b>caring pedagogy</b> for students in Hong Kong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth interviews with students</li> <li>▪ Researcher's notes</li> </ul>

## Appendix 5. Instructions on Write-up Accounts

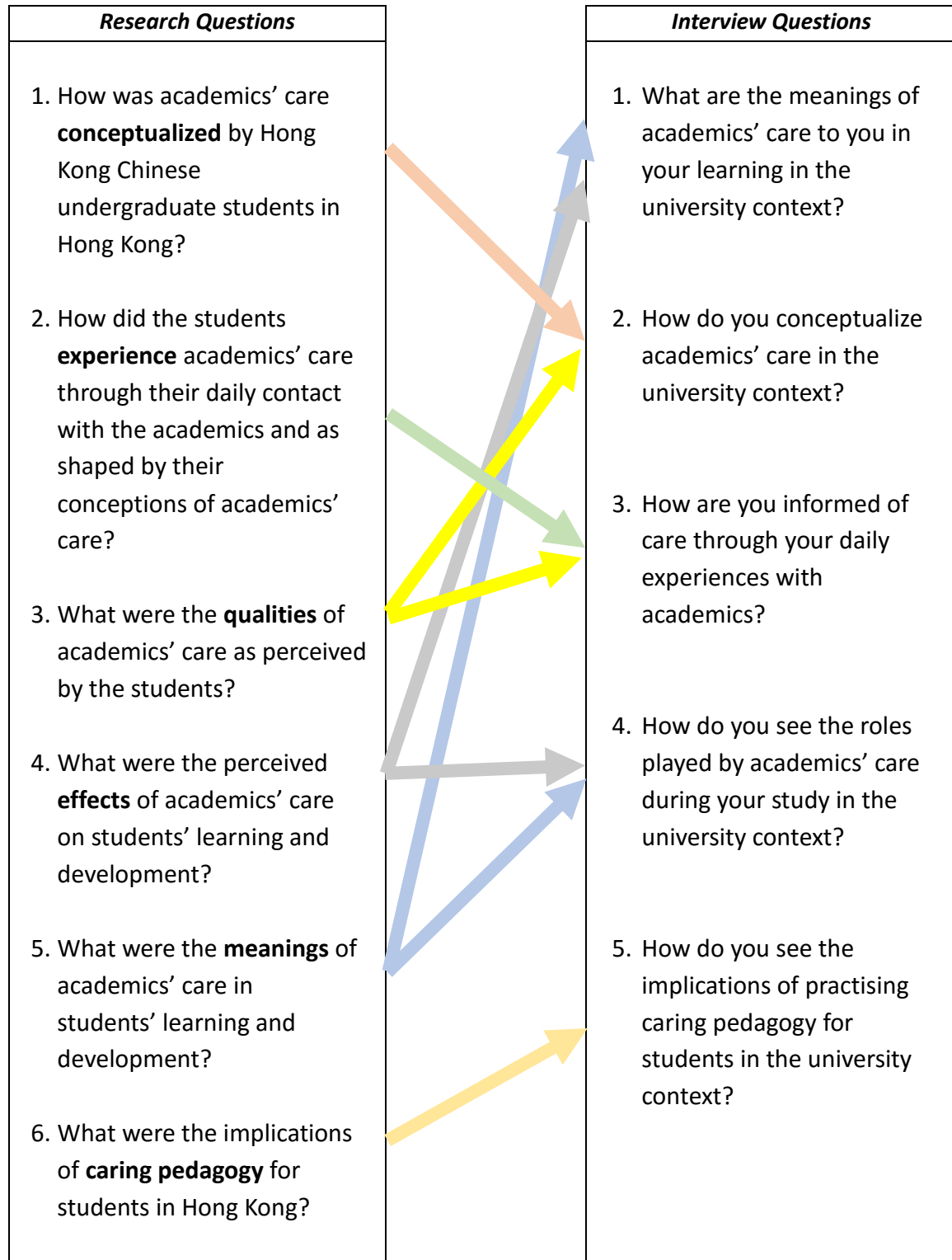
*Dear Student*

*Please write one exemplary case of experiencing academic's care in your university study, and state the distinguished qualities of academics' care that make you feel this is an exemplary case of academics' care, in the space below.*

*Kindly return the forms to me in two weeks' time. It is not required to disclose the academic's name in the mentioned case. Anonymity is guaranteed and your identity will not be disclosed. Your opinions shared in the research will have absolute NO effect on the assessment or grade awarded in the University.*

*Your faithfully  
Anne Tang*

## Appendix 6. Connection between the Research Questions and the Interview Questions





## **Appendix 7. Interview Guide**

### Opening Questions

- If I mention academics' care in the university context, what will come to your mind?
- Could you please further elaborate your impressions?

### Research Question (4)

***What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?***

### Research Question (5)

***What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?***

### Interview Question (1)

**What are the meanings of academics' care to you in your learning in the university context?**

### Probing Questions

- Could you please elaborate to me why you bestow the mentioned meanings to academics' care in your learning in the university context?
- How do you see the differences between academics' care in university, and teachers' care in secondary schools or primary schools?
- Why do you have such views?
- What is your expectation of academics' care in university?
- Could you please quote some examples to illustrate it?
- How is your expectation of academics' care in university different from that of teachers' care in secondary schools or primary schools?
- Why do you have such opinions?

### Research Question (1)

***How was academics' care conceptualized by Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students in Hong Kong?***

### Research Question (3)

***What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?***

### Interview Question (2)

**How do you conceptualize academics' care in the university context?**

## ***Appendix 7. Interview Guide (Continued)***

### **Probing Questions**

- Could you please elaborate to your conception of academics' care in the university context?
- What are the key constructs (qualities) in defining academics' care in the university context?
- Could you please quote examples to illustrate your views?
- Why do you regard the mentioned constructs (qualities) as key ones in defining academics' care in the university context?
- Could you please explain?
- Please list the mentioned key constructs (qualities) in the order of importance.
- Why do you see the mentioned construct (quality) as the most crucial one in defining academics' care in the university context?
- Could you please further elaborate it?

### **Research Question (2)**

***How did the students experience academics' care through their daily contact with the academics and as shaped by their conceptions of academics' care?***

### **Research Question (3)**

***What were the qualities of academics' care as perceived by the students?***

### **Interview Question (3)**

**How are you informed of care through your daily experiences with academics?**

### **Probing Questions**

- Could you please elaborate why those experiences with academics inform you of care?
- How can you tell a caring academic from a non-caring one?
- Could you please further elaborate your views?
- Could you please cite one exemplary example to illustrate how an academic delivers care during your study in university?
- Why do you think the mentioned exemplary example as best illustration of academics' care?
- Could you please explain?
- Could you please cite one critical incident to illustrate a learning experience being overwhelmed by academics' care during your study in university?
- Why do you think the mentioned critical incident as best illustration of a learning experience being overwhelmed by academics' care?
- Could you please explain?

## ***Appendix 7. Interview Guide (Continued)***

### **Research Question (4)**

***What were the perceived effects of academics' care on students' learning and development?***

### **Research Question (5)**

***What were the meanings of academics' care in students' learning and development?***

### **Interview Question (4)**

**How do you see the roles played by academics' care during your study in the university context?**

#### **Probing Questions**

- Could you please illustrate your views with examples concerning the roles played by academics' care during your study in university?
- What is the significance of academics' care to you in your learning in the university context?
- Could you please further elaborate it?

### **Research Question (6)**

***What were the implications of caring pedagogy for students in Hong Kong?***

### **Interview Question (5)**

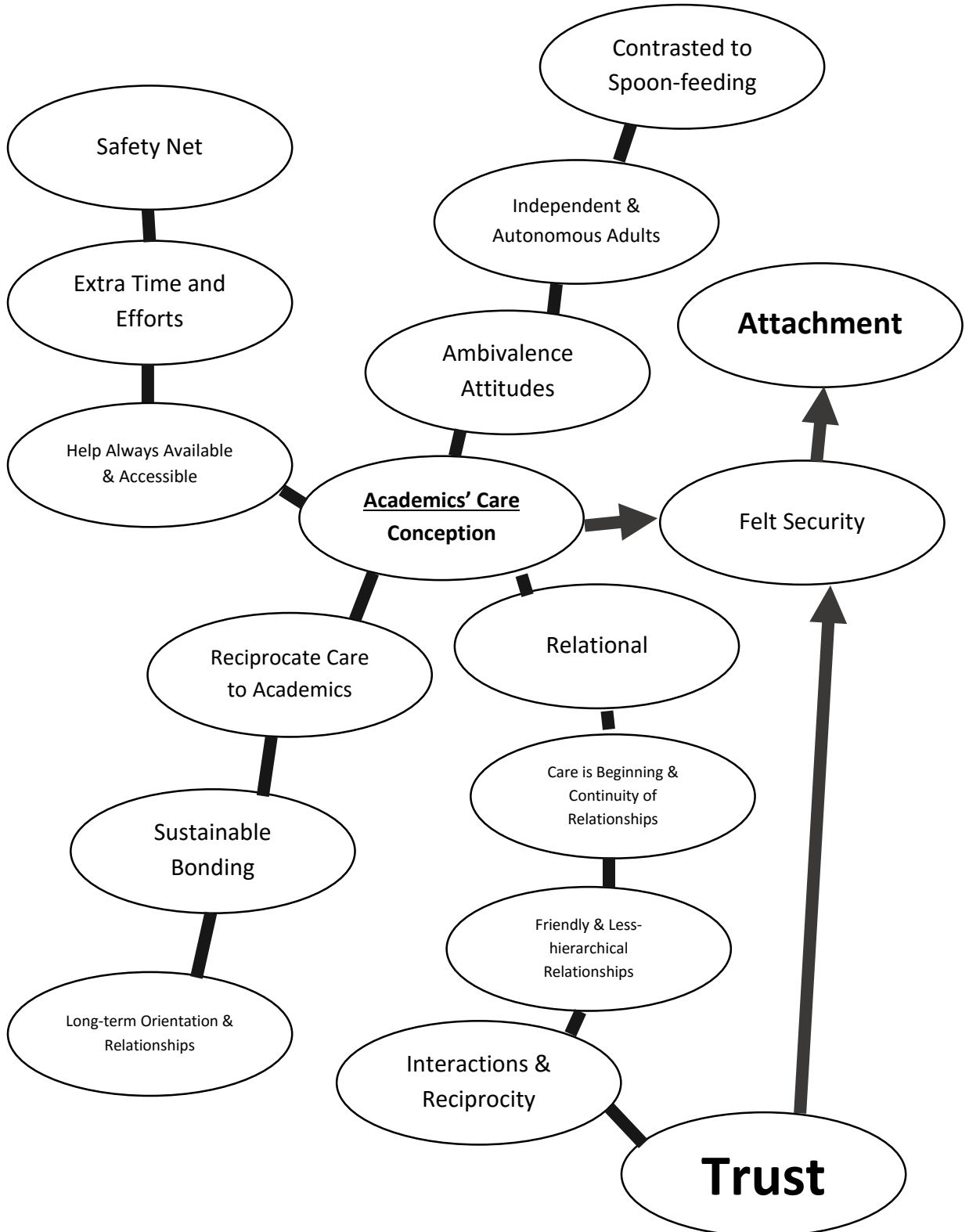
**How do you see the implications of practising caring pedagogy for students in the university context?**

#### **Probing Questions**

- Could you please further elaborate the effects of practising caring pedagogy on students in the university context?
- Could you please recommend ways to integrate academics' care in daily teaching practices for facilitating students' learning and development in the university context?
- Could you please illustrate your recommendations with examples?
- What kinds of roles should an academic undertake in practising caring pedagogy in the university context?
- Could you please further elaborate it?
- Do you have any other comments that you would like to make concerning academics' care in the university context?

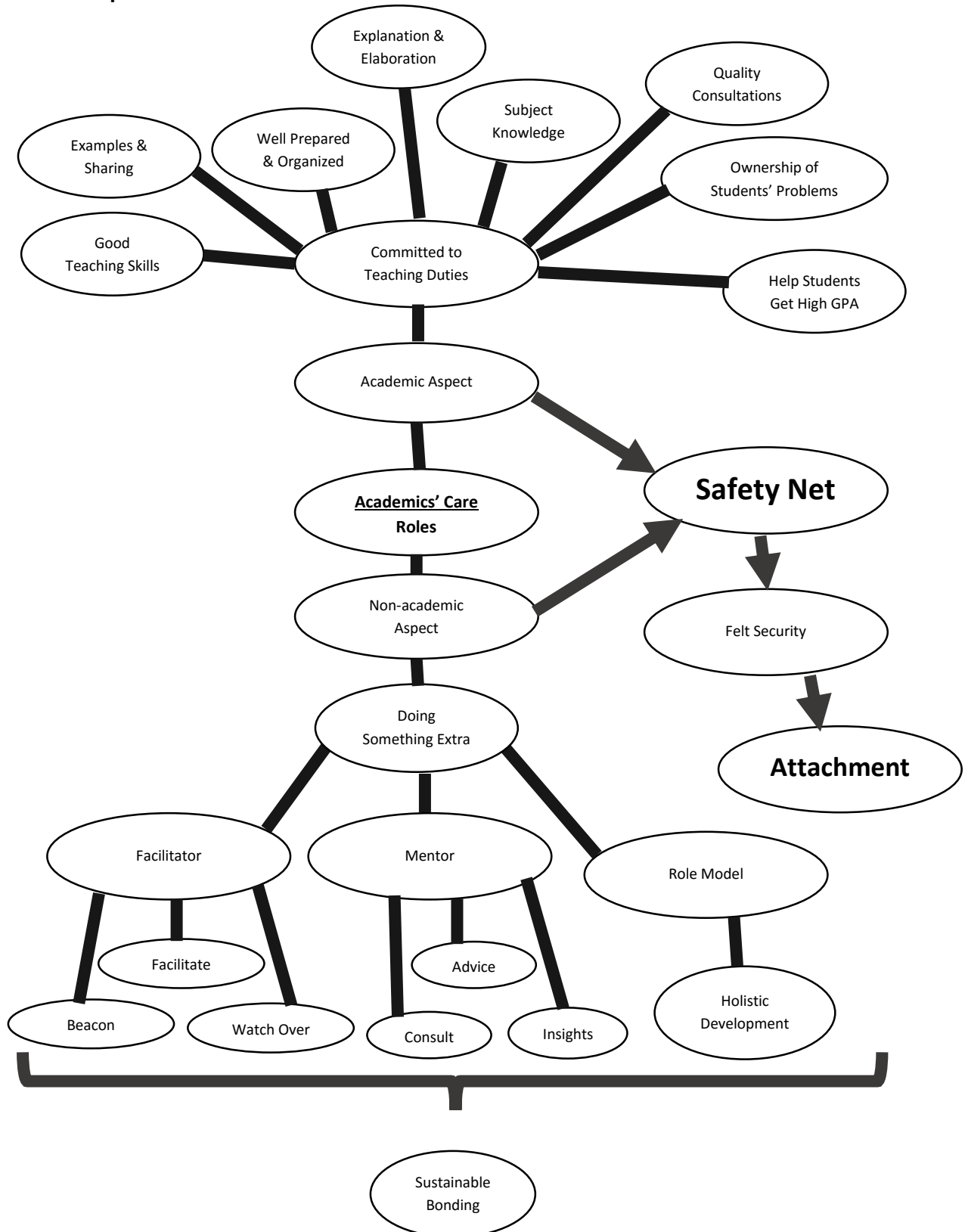
## Appendix 8. Mind Maps

### Mind Map 1: Conceptions of Academics' Care



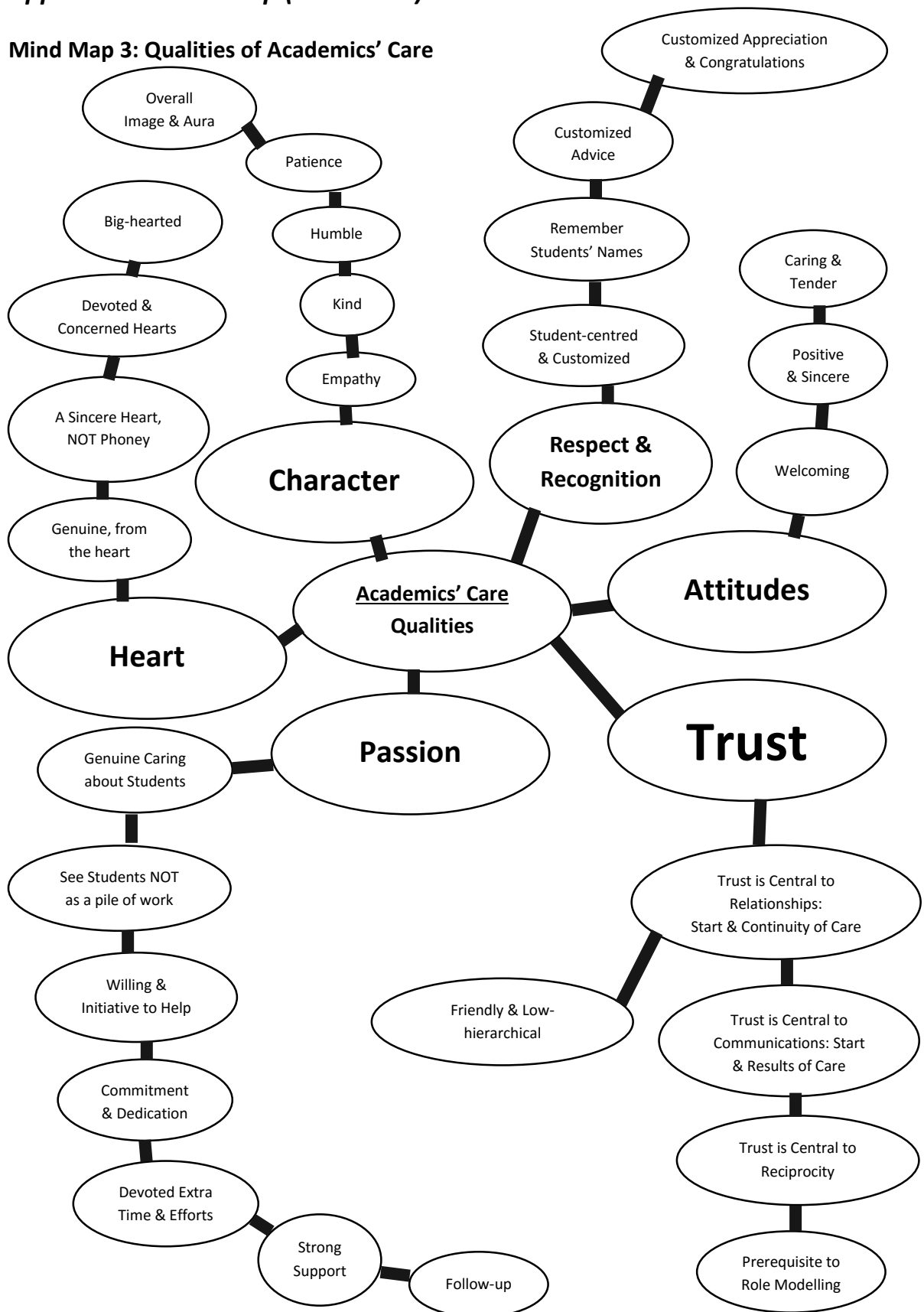
## Appendix 8. Mind Map (Continued)

### Mind Map 2: Roles of Academics' Care



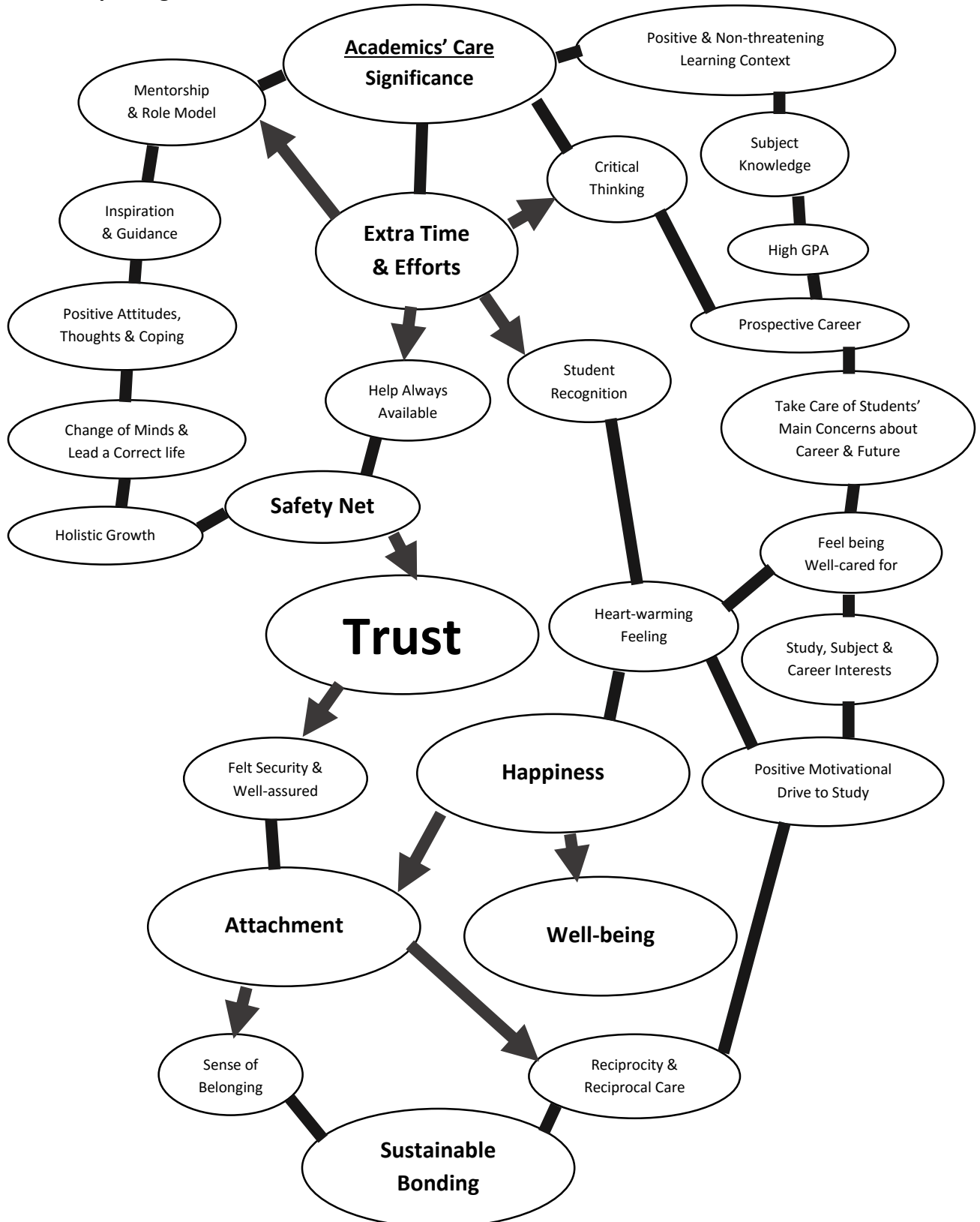
## Appendix 8. Mind Map (Continued)

### Mind Map 3: Qualities of Academics' Care



## Appendix 8. Mind Map (Continued)

Mind Map 4: Significance of Academics' Care



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